

PEGGY — *AT*
SPINSTER
FARM

HELEN M. WINSLOW





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SPINSTER FARM



"IT WAS 'ONE OF THE SHOW PLACES OF THE TOWN'"

(See page 87)

PEGGY AT SPINSTER FARM

By HELEN M. WINSLOW

Author of "Literary Boston of To-day," "The Woman of
To-morrow," etc.

*Lover of books as I am, I would barter them all
Just for a day with the book of the fields and the fens,
Pine-ways and mountain-pool, hill views and far-away glens,
Farm-path and gray pasture-wall.*

Illustrated from Photographs by
MARY G. HUNTSMAN



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To
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Publishers' Note

THE first edition of "Peggy at Spinster Farm" was published under the title selected for the manuscript, "Spinster Farm," but, shortly after the book appeared, the friends, both of the author and of the publishers, pointed out that "Peggy at Spinster Farm" was the more appropriate title, since, after all, it is around Peggy and her love affair that the book centres.

Accordingly, but few copies of the first printing had been issued before it was decided to change the title, and the greater portion of the first edition appeared with the present title, "Peggy at Spinster Farm."

In the second printing the new title is adhered to, but it is deemed advisable to explain the somewhat unusual action of changing the title of a story after publication.

Oct. 1, 1908.

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SPINSTER FARM

THE PROLOGUE

“ THEN I may not even hope? ” asked the Professor.

“ No, ” answered the Spinster. “ You see we are rather past the stage when marriage is the one essential. We have arrived at the age where a novelist would describe us as ‘ no longer young. ’ We are settled in our habits, which is another term for just a bit selfish; we could not possibly be so absorbed in one another as to forget our own little idiosyncrasies. Doubtless we could change, — but we should be very unhappy doing it. For instance, I always wear six hairpins and stick them in in exactly the same order; you probably

would die before you would wear one sock wrong side out. Not that we should want to ask of each other the sacrifice of these particular habits, but I use them just as an example, to impress upon you the difficulty of altering our settled habits in little things, — and there are hundreds of little ways in which we might try one another's patience up to the breaking-point. You are fond of heavy breakfasts; I, of a roll and a cup of strong coffee. Do you think you love me enough to give up your hearty meal at seven A.M.? Because I confess that I could not yield the point and instead of coming down at eight to my simple repast, meet you at seven and eat steak."

"You're talking nonsense now," answered the Professor. "Happiness does not depend on when we eat our breakfasts, much less on the number of hairpins you wear. And if we are getting settled in such trivial habits and are becoming slaves to such petty rounds

of living, why, my point is proved. We need to marry and to live for somebody and something else."

"Not I," insisted the Spinster. "I have lived for other people until I am worn out with it. The only thing I ask of other folk is that they keep away and give me a chance to find myself again. I want to get away into the deep, deep woods somewhere and close to the heart of things. It seems to me I could find a saner and a more enjoyable way of living than the one we practise here in the city. I think people ought to live alone a part of every year. In order that they may seek and find not themselves, but the storm-centre, so to speak, of their own natures. If I could get away from everything here and get out under the wide sky and the guarding stars, I could get over this sense of strain and onrush that is killing us women."

"I shall be delighted to take you anywhere

you want to go; we could go up into the Adirondacks or 'way down into Maine and stay there for months," urged the Professor.

"Thanks." The Spinster's tone was not encouraging. "I said alone. I am sure I have lived beyond the age where one gives up all her own individuality — "

"I should hope so," interrupted the Professor.

"And so have you," she went on, ignoring the implied compliment. "You would, after the first, find a woman very much in the way. You have come and gone and worked or played according to your own sweet will for so long that the rôle of devoted husband would drive you to — well, distraction of some sort, some other woman, no doubt; and I shouldn't like that; nor put up with it half as well as a younger and more ignorant woman would."

"Let me repeat, you are talking nonsense," answered the Professor. "As we grow older, the need of a home gets more insistent with

every normal human being. A man does not want to sink into a selfish crab; he must have an incentive; he wants something to work for, to live for, — yes, somebody to love and to love him. That's why I want you."

The Spinster looked up at him keenly. If he had said more, she would have yielded; but he paused a moment too quick. He just stood looking at her, waiting for her answer.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be wise," she said, after a little time, — her old impulses getting control again. "You see, it isn't as if I had never cared," she went on softly. "There doesn't seem to me any substitute for one's first love."

"Then there is some one else?" asked the Professor in a different tone.

"There *was* somebody," said the Spinster. "But —"

"But — ?" he insisted.

"I haven't seen him for years," said the

Spinster. "Still, he may come back; and, well, — you wouldn't want a woman who could still feel that if that other man wanted her, she would be willing to crawl to him on her hands and knees, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't," replied the Professor. "But you are not that kind of a woman; you only think you are."

"As if you knew!" she retorted.

CHAPTER I

FINDING THE PLACE

“POOR thing! Her long illness must have unsettled her mind,” was the verdict of the Spinster’s friends when they heard of it. “Still she always was a little queer, was Janet Fleming.”

For so are we wedded to the flesh-pots of Citydom that when one of us women withdraws voluntarily from the human maelstrom and goes out under the wide sky into the fields and orchards and woods, where calmness and strength and sanity of living combine to make life grow young again, that one is looked upon pityingly and called “crazy” or, at the least, “queer.” The Spinster had dreamed for

years of an old-fashioned, roomy house somewhere among the hills that was to be hers; a place with great trees around it and wide spaces and glimpses of hills, with sunshine and simple, delightful living. With her, as with most women in towns, life had become too complicated.

She had belonged to clubs by the dozen; she had appeared before legislative bodies and on the platform in women's conventions; she had served on the school committee and the prison commission; and withal she had kept in the social swing, appearing at all the teas and receptions, private and public, which a woman of manifold interests is expected to attend. And, finally, she had "broken down," that deplorable condition which threatens every over-active woman of to-day. Many a sleepless night had she passed, shutting her heart to the street noises below and picturing to herself the grand old trees that should wave their branches

against the starlit sky for her; many a wakeful dawn had she comforted her soul with visions of sunlit horizons and the trilling of birds on her farm-to-be.

Every Spring for years the Spinster's thoughts had strayed from desks and typewriters, from secretaries and committee meetings, out to where she knew Mayflowers must be gleaming from under budding shrubbery and anemones beginning to show their wind-blown faces along the bare hillsides. In the Autumns, she had crossed the parks picturing to herself, under the bare trees, the gushing, sparkling streams which must be somewhere plashing cold against the rocks and alder-bushes and slipping noiselessly under the fading bracken, and had wondered vaguely whether the squirrels and crows were gone into Winter quarters — even while she planned the busy activities of the coming Winter. But it was Peggy who finally made the start.

"Come," she had burst forth one morning, in despair over her aunt's white face and listless attitude. "I am tired of the city; you are worn out with it. Let's find some place in the country and go hide ourselves."

"Oh," groaned the Spinster, "how I'd like to! But we can't."

"And why?" demanded Peggy, nose in the air.

"Why, there's your career, for one thing," began the Spinster. "And I have so many things to do, if I ever get well enough. But, oh, dear, how I'd love to go."

"You are not going to do things any more for a long time, Auntie, not if I've anything to say. And as for my career — well, just now 'the aim and ambition of my life,' as old Deacon Barker says, is to be a hen-woman."

"A what?" and the Spinster nearly sat up straight.

"A hen-woman. Keep hens, you know," returned Peggy calmly. "It may not be as

æsthetic an occupation as Art, but I imagine it is more profitable, at least to the beginner — and saner,” she added with a twinkle of her blue eye. “Think of me up at six in the morning, feeding-dish in hand, surrounded by my feathered flock.”

Peggy was a wise young woman, and she met the doctor in the hall that morning. In consequence of which he remarked to the Spinster, before leaving the house:

“You will have to get away from the city for awhile. Go somewhere and don’t come back for two years. Here you’ve lived, stived up in this flat for years, with no real exercise, no genuine home life, nothing but a rush of exhaustive activities, enough to wear out the nerves of a Hebe. Now, give it all up. Go off somewhere into God’s own country and live naturally, healthfully and happily. It’ll add twenty years to your life. I’ll not answer for you if you don’t take my advice.”

“ I’m going to see a real estate man this very day,” Peggy announced a little later. And she was as good as her word — seeing real estate agents, in fact, every day for two weeks — and going off into many and various places, only to return at nightfall disgusted, footsore and weary.

“ I believe Ananias had his early training in a real estate office, writing advertisements of lonely, unsalable, horrid farms,” she burst out one night at dinner. “ And where his glowing diction failed, Sapphira was called in to put the finishing touches. Where do you think I’ve been to-day? This morning I went to the last office on my list — I’ve been to every one mentioned in the directory. I climbed up the winding stairway, where sat the plump, gray-whiskered old spider awaiting the silly fly — ”

“ Which walked in as innocently as ever a fly could.”

“Of course, or I wouldn’t be telling you this. ‘Just exactly what you want, miss,’ he said. ‘A fine old house of eleven rooms, well set back from the road, fine shade trees, good water, everything heart could wish, and located next door to the historic old Wayside Inn.’ I do think I’ve learned a little wisdom in the past two weeks, but this sounded so very attractive, I just wanted to see it. So I took the next train for Wayside. Well! I won’t attempt to describe my mile-and-a-half walk through the desolate sands before I found that ‘gem,’ nor try to do justice to the story-and-a-half dilapidated cottage, originally painted a hideous shade of lilac and faded by many Summers’ suns; and I won’t tell you much about the well of ‘good water’ several rods away from the house under a broken pump, or the lonesome, damp old lane that leads from the house to the unfrequented road. And it was all huddled off into a swamp, where I wouldn’t dare stay

overnight — ugh! And now I'm done with real estate hunting. I see my feathered flock only as a vanishing-point in the distance of a mirage. But still we must go into the country. The doctor said so." And Peggy gazed pensively into the salad-bowl.

"We can't," groaned the Spinster, half-heartedly, for she, too, had been building castles in the air while Peggy was farm-hunting. "I am too weak to have the moving on my hands, and you — well, you have had enough of it already. Robert Graves was here this afternoon."

"What did he want?" and Peggy looked very innocent.

"He said he came to see how I was getting on," returned the Spinster. "Of course, I have no reason to doubt his word. He inquired for you just as he was going away — or, that is, just before he said he really must go."

“And you told him?” asked Peggy carelessly.

“Of your plans for the country,” was the exasperatingly calm reply. “All about your ideas of hens and a dog and a pony. I think I was nearly as eloquent as you can be.”

“And he said?” with even more studied carelessness.

“‘Oh,’ he cried, ‘what a pity. With all her fine talent and all. But you will prevent her from carrying out such a crazy notion, won’t you, Miss Fleming?’”

“Well, I like his independence,” and Peggy flushed up to the roots of her pretty hair. “Prevent me, indeed! And my fine talent forsooth! Why, he was criticizing my work frightfully only last week.” And she rose to steady her aunt’s footsteps into the library.

Ten minutes later she waved the evening paper in the air, and burst forth again:

“Eureka! Listen to this:

“ ‘FOR SALE — Historic old homestead: colonial mansion of 13 rooms with 25 acres of land, fine orchard, grand old trees. Been in one family for 150 years. Just the thing for a gentleman’s place —’

“ or old maid’s either,” interpolated Peggy —
“ or for an up-to-date hen farm.

“ Why, Auntie, here’s Providence just throwing at us the very thing we are sighing for.” And she went over to the desk to write to the advertiser — a Mr. Francis, who dwelt in Elysium, forty miles away from the “ madding crowd.”

In a day or two the answer came, setting forth the beauties of the place in no uncertain way, and moving Peggy once more to hie herself away into the Promised Land. At night she came home in a glow of enthusiasm, and two days later the Spinster herself set forth, for at last they had found the right place.

The house, which originally had been built and inhabited by a Tory, was confiscated by the Federals at the beginning of the Revolutionary War, as the two were told before they reached the centre of Elysium, where it was located. As the two women approached it, the March sun was at his best, and the old, square yellow farmhouse wore an atmosphere of such enticing peace that the Spinster's heart went forth to it, even before she entered the quaint, old-time front door.

She passed joyfully through the little "entry," with its queer, winding stairway, out into big, low-ceilinged square rooms and on into the long, low kitchen with its west windows, its old brick oven and closed-up fireplace, which had cooked many a dinner for the defenders of the Georges. She noted with satisfaction the big, airy chambers, each bedroom having a fireplace of its own; she went out to the great, century-old barn and stopped

to visit the other outbuildings, and then she said:

“ I will take it. It’s exactly the place I’ve had in mind for twenty years.” Whereupon Peggy proceeded to execute a dainty little dance, beyond the vision of Mr. Francis.

The “ mansion,” as it used to be called, stands on an eastern slope, facing the sunrise and commanding a sweep of fifteen miles of lovely, wooded country and picturesque hill and dale. To the westward, beyond the fine old orchard, stretches a mountain landscape some twenty miles until it recedes in a background of rounded peaks. The house had many peculiarities to distinguish it from the modern “ villa ” and to delight the romantic Peggy. There was but one door-knob on the place, and that on a door leading from the stable into the great barn — evidently put there to supply some late necessity. The old latches were in great variety. All the hinges were

made by hand in years long gone by, and hand-wrought nails abounded through the house, put in long before the invention of machine-made ones. The outside clapboards were graduated to a thin edge at the ends and overlapped like shingles, being fastened with round-headed, hand-made nails four inches in length. The great oaken beams, both in house and barn, were secured by wooden pins. There were fine old flagstones around the doors and a rose garden, all atangle, and dear, old-fashioned "grass roses" all along the roadside opposite.

They moved out in time to watch the unfolding of the Spring. Bluebirds were already singing and robins calling from the tall elm beside the house. Frogs made the twilight musical with their plaintive note, and the peach-orchard was a mass of pink blossoms. They had time to get settled before the great apple-orchard bloomed into full glory, and they caught the

outputting of lilac and syringa bushes, of hepaticas and anemones and acres of blue violets. And then they began to get acquainted with their new home. There was the walnut pasture, with its grove of shagbark giants, its spring, its King apple and Roxbury russet trees, its carpet of wintergreen and checkerberry vine. They took stock of their currant-bushes, their rows of blackberries, their grapes and cherries, early and late, and daily thanked the fates that had guided them. Best of all were the great wind-swept spaces, the refreshing silences of nature, the constant song of Spring birds — the oriole, the blackbird, the flicker, the wren, the meadow-lark, the bobolink.

As the Summer advanced they came to know better the cedar-bird, the little goldfinches and the bluejays, the oven-bird's hurried call at sunset, the swift down-rush of the nighthawk, the intimacy of the chimney-swift, the occa-

sional pheasant and the companionship of "Bob White." And there was to sweeten existence for the Spinster in her convalescence the great, soft silence of the night, the gentle breaking of the dawn, the splendid morning star, the glowing sunrise and the gorgeous display in the west as the great luminary sank again behind the mountains at twilight.

"Strange," said her friends, "that Janet Fleming should have taken that place on impulse, the very first time that she saw it. She's the last person in the world we would have expected to go into voluntary exile."

But it was not an impulse. The Spinster merely recognized her own when she came to it — a thing so easy in the missing.

CHAPTER II

GETTING SETTLED

JUST to be out-of-doors was enough for the Spinster when she was first liberated from the thraldom of "engagements." She felt as the squirrel must, which has been confined in a cage with a revolving wheel, when by some chance he slips away from his captors and finds himself in the woods leaping from tree-top to tree-top. Cherries were ripe early in June and furnished a harvest that attracted the birds in great flocks, making the air jocund with song the whole, livelong day, for their feathered friends soon found that there were no nets spread to catch their unwary feet, and as they took only the cherries that grew

on the tops of the trees or tips of branches, the Spinster lost nothing by her hospitable mood. Such twittering and calling and chattering and scolding as went on from morning till night. Flocks of cedar-birds (or "cherry-birds"), their little green caps awry, would descend suddenly and skirmish for supplies; bluebirds dashed overhead like flashes from the June sky and the tuneful orioles became the Spinster's good chums, alighting on the tree — while Peggy was mounted on the step-ladder below it — all discussing the size and flavour of the fruit as intimately as possible.

"The birds in Elysium are evidently of the opinion that the Golden Age has returned," said the Spinster one day. "I'm told the neighbours all around us feed whole flocks in Winter. And it's a plan that works both ways, for Summer cannot seem so far away with flocks of birds chattering in the orchards or hopping across the lawns in snow-time."

“Do you know there are golden pheasants all about here?” put in Peggy. “Hiram told me this morning that a hunting club bought and let loose a few of these beautiful birds some years ago, right in our pasture. Then the club went to pieces, and a law for the protection of the birds was passed by the Legislature, and — well, we have pheasants. Think of owning a place with pheasants!” And the young woman ran over to embrace her aunt in congratulation. “And Hiram says he fed a flock of nine of them all last Winter, and that by and by we shall find ourselves starting them up from cover in our daily walks quite often. He says, too, nobody in Elysium carries a gun, and even the wily fox goes free.”

“You may not be so enthusiastic over that when your hens get to raising young chickens,” the Spinster replied; for no sooner were they fairly settled in their new home than Peggy had announced that she wanted to buy some hens.

"Now, Peggy," her aunt had protested. "You really don't want to keep hens? They are a lot of trouble, and the least interesting animate objects that you can select."

But Peggy's heart was set on having a poultry plant.

"You ought to read the farm journals and poultry books," she said. "Why, people are making loads of money keeping hens. Besides, I like hens. They know a lot. I read only yesterday," she urged, "that one woman cleared from one hundred and seven hens a profit of \$532.78; and there was a girl who bought three hens, with her own allowance, and raised forty-seven chickens the first year. In three years her flock had increased to seven hundred hens. What do you think of that?"

"I think the age of romance is not ended yet," was her aunt's retort, "but if you want me to go 'hen-hunting' with you this afternoon, we'll borrow Hiram's horse."

Hiram was the neighbour who had been engaged as man of all work at Spinster Farm. A queer character he was — a farmer who had always lived in Elysium. He owned a small place just back of Spinster Farm and lived quietly with a wife whose end of the buggy seat settled far below his when they drove to the village every Sunday. The Spinster took great delight in exercising his conversational powers, which were indeed remarkable, and his quaint ways of putting things soon convinced her that originality of mind is by no means the result of education.

“Kind o’ wore out, be ye?” he had asked the very first day. “Wal, some women never know how to take things easy. I tell my wife, when she tries to hurry things by tellin’ me to make hay when the sun shines, thet there ain’t no call to try to make it so tarnal fast thet ye git sunstruck in the process. I reckon you’re one o’ them kind.” And she felt that he

had the power of character-reading to a science.

When they went over to engage the horse, they found him at the grindstone, which he had rigged up to run by foot-power.

“Yes,” he said, “you c’n hev the hoss, tho’ I was sort o’ cal’atin’ to cultivate them beans this afternoon with him. Soon’s I git this knife ground down I’ll hitch up for ye. I sometimes wonder why ’tis if it takes a hundred-an’-fifty-pound grindstone to put an edge on a two-ounce knife, that sometimes a little word that don’t weigh nothin’ ’ll put an edge on a hundred-an’-eighty-pound woman,” which led the Spinster to believe that domestic infelicity was not unknown in Hiram’s family. “After hens, did ye say? Why, I’ve got some hens I’d sell ye — Barred Plymouth Rocks, too; ain’t no better. How many d’ye want?”

“How many have you?” asked Peggy with true Yankee shrewdness. “How many

can I keep over there? And how much do you want for them? ”

“ Let ye have twenty-five or so, and cheap, too,” was the answer. “ Ain’t no need of your chasin’ all over town after hens. An’ you can’t keep no more, ’less ye build a new hen-house.”

So Peggy, finding the hens to her liking, invested thirteen dollars in hens and gave up her “ hen-hunt,” taking a long walk instead, with the Spinster for company. For with returning health, the woman who had depended on cabs and trolley-cars for years was beginning to find out the real pleasure as well as the beneficial effects of a brisk walk. Across the pasture they went down into the woodsy corner where grew the young wintergreens and where the Indian-pipe tried to hide under the low bushes of cornel and huckleberry. Then after resting on the moss-grown stumps of walnut-trees they went on until they climbed Benjamin

Hill, which commanded a magnificent view for miles all around them.

“Is there anything more inspiring,” asked Peggy, “than a mountainous view from one of our New England hilltops?”

“Doubtless a Westerner would say yes, and quote the Rockies to us,” returned her aunt. “But this is good enough for me. And how it does seem to drive the crankiness all out of one to stand here and let the good west wind blow across one’s face and take deep breaths of this June-sweet air. Peggy, what slaves we are to old ‘They,’ anyway.”

“We are like playing ‘Simon says thumbs up,’” answered Peggy. “If the milliner says ‘hats up,’ we strain every nerve to wear ‘em up; if she says ‘hats down,’ we just tumble over ourselves to get them down again. I don’t believe we need half the things we think we do, Auntie.”

“I’m convinced of it, and we only think we

do because we see other women having them. Life is a struggle, both for rich and poor; but it is hardest of all on the masses of women who live just above want and yet are without the means of gratifying half their wants. The average woman longs for things only because other women have them. She would be quite content with the estate wherein Providence had placed her if He had not seen fit to place others on a different footing. We do not need half the clothes, the tables, the chairs, the draperies, the hundreds of useless objects we so diligently acquire; we only think we do. And we think so because we see other people owning them. To keep up appearances and make people think they are better off than they are, half the world is living in mortgaged houses and wearing clothes that are not paid for. And from the snare of small debts many a man seeks to escape by speculation or speculation — with ruin at the end.”

“Half the fun of living out here,” said Peggy when her aunt stopped for breath, “is the freedom to dress comfortably and sensibly. I hate the thought of going back to town and wearing tight, uncomfortable corsets again. As for evening dress — I say, Auntie, you should have seen Julia yesterday when I took out that gray Paris gown of yours and shook it to refold it again. Her eyes opened wide with astonishment. She supposed you hadn’t anything more than the linen and denim gowns you’ve been wearing.”

“Strange how one’s point of view changes with one’s environment,” resumed the Spinster, musingly. “When I go into the city, to-day, I see everywhere the man with the muck-rake, his eyes ever on the ground, insensible to the world of beauty around him. People hurry on with eager, strained faces, wildly pursuing the unattainable; or, if it proves to be attainable, to what end? The best countenances have a weary, unrested look; the worst are

worse than I ever realized before. So much of the real essence of life is lost to these hurried and breathless ones. I thank God for the privilege of living where I may look up to the stars and listen with quiet heart for the music of the spheres. After a day of noise, of struggling with pushing, jostling crowds in the city, the old, low-ceilinged living-room, with its cheerful wood fire in the ancient fireplace, its comfortable old chairs, its books and its home atmosphere, seems to me the most refreshing spot on earth.

“ I recall the long days I used to spend in ill-ventilated lecture halls and committee rooms only to be followed by a hurried meal and a rush for club meetings or theatres; never a quiet home evening with books and wood fires, always a mad rush for somewhere. And I thank my stars again for this. God’s great outdoors is free. So far no trust or monopoly has it under control.

“ As I sit in my chimney-corner o’ nights



"- AS I SIT IN MY CHIMNEY - CORNER O' NIGHTS' "



(in the very chair I was rocked in as a baby) watching the firelight glow across the book-cases and gleaming through the small-paned windows to cheer the infrequent passer-by, I say to myself: 'When cheeriness and leisure and comfort and quiet happiness can be found so easily, why do so many restless, unsatisfied women stay in towns? For this way lies peace.' "

"You say it to me, Auntie, every night of your life," laughed Peggy. "And now, after that preachment, I dare you to catch me before I get to that tree at the foot of the hill." But the Spinster did not accept the challenge, knowing there was but one way for her to keep up with the fleet-footed Peggy—and that by the undignified method of rolling down hill.

When Peggy reached home, some moments before the Spinster, she drew up suddenly, with a flush of lovely colour flooding her face and neck and rounded chin. There on the door-step, waiting, sat Robert Graves.

“You?” said Peggy. “When and how did you come? And why didn’t you let me meet you at the station?”

“You haven’t said you are glad to see me, Peggy, yet,” said the young man. “Say it.”

The girl laughed and glanced up at him. “You take it for granted. That’s enough,” she said. “Come back and meet Auntie with me. She’ll be surprised.”

“And she won’t hesitate to say she is glad,” retorted he.

“Whether she is or not,” persisted Peggy. “For such is the way of society folk, and we can’t shed city habits all in a minute.”

“You seem to be getting on with the attempt,” said Robert, and then they came up with the Spinster, walking slowly and looking at them. She was thinking how little it takes to make young people happy, and how easily things go wrong.

CHAPTER III

BUYING A HORSE

“SHALL we or shall we not buy a horse?” soon became the burning question at Spinster Farm. Hiram, like many another man of all work, possessed the faculty of being somewhere else when he was most wanted, and consequently it began to appear that the more animals they had the more they would have to care for themselves in emergencies. True, they could borrow Hiram’s ancient and respectable beast, but being what that worthy called “slow-gaited” and somewhat uncertain in temper, they soon found that a rather unsatisfactory method of seeing the country. Hiram, accustomed to his evolutions, paid little heed to them, never stop-

ping even to straighten him out when he had kicked over the traces, secure in the knowledge that if let alone Old Tom would get himself right again; but the Spinster found it difficult to be complacent under those conditions.

“I never mind nothin’ about him when he cuts up his capers,” said Hiram one day when they had reached home with one thill under the old horse. “If he’d ruther travel that way, I let him. When he gits sick on’t he’ll git his legs where they belong.” But that philosophy was scarcely adapted to the Spinster’s needs. The climax was reached one day when she and Peggy rode away over the hills into a neighbouring town early in June.

“One mean trick he hain’t got,” Hiram stated as he brought him to the door. “He won’t start up an’ back with ye. Fact is, he won’t git scared at anything. So’s’t ye needn’t be afraid anywhere with him.” But six miles away Old Tom took it into his equine men-

talities to see what he could do. As they were climbing a long hill they saw ahead of them two men, and a barrel mounted on a farm wagon. From this barrel a hose was playing, sending jets of some disinfectant across the adjacent apple-trees. This fearful sight was too much for the ancient Thomas. He did not run. Oh, no! He backed. In spite of all the Spinster could do, he persisted in backing. The whites of his eyes rolled dangerously, and his great mouth yawned like a cavern. Peggy screamed, while the Spinster held on with a death-like grip. She had already broken the whip on his callous flanks, and the situation seemed appalling. Destruction, if not immediate death, seemed imminent when one of the men came running over and, seizing Old Tom by the bit, led him by the dreadful object which had so disturbed him. This episode closed their connections with Hiram's outfit.

About a week after this event, as they were

sitting by the fire one dark, rainy night, the Spinster was called by her maid. "A man wants to see you at the back door," she said. "I told him you didn't like to be disturbed, but he said he'd got to see you personally, ma'am."

"Mercy me!" she exclaimed. "I hope it isn't a tramp."

"Oh, my!" put in Peggy, with a thrill in her voice, "what an adventure." And she followed her aunt to the back door, both of them cautiously peering out into the rain. They could see no one, but a voice soon made itself heard.

"I hear you want to buy a horse, ma'am. I've got jest the right one here for you, ma'am. Belongs to a friend of mine, and I tho't you ought to see him right away."

"I don't want to buy," began the Spinster, but the voice flowed on: "She's all right, every way. Sound's a nut and kind in harness and won't run away, and even a child can

handle her. You could drive her forty miles without stopping if you want. She's a pretty good looker tho' you can't see her very well in this light. Thought I'd bring her right over."

"But I don't want to buy."

"My cousin bought her this morning over Pleasantville way, but she's a little too heavy a hoss for him. He'll sell her for only forty dollars. A perfect horse in every way. Ain't got no tricks."

"I say," and the Spinster raised her voice again, "*I don't want a horse of any kind.*"

But the fluent seller was persistent. "It isn't often you'll pick up a bargain like this. If you want a hoss any time this Summer this is the hoss you want."

"I don't want a horse," fairly shrieked the Spinster, while Peggy from behind cried, "No, no, no! we don't want the horse."

"It's a good hoss, ma'am, and only —" but the Spinster shut the door, leaving him there

in the darkness with the rain beating against him and his forty-dollar animal.

Early next morning a knock was heard at the west door and the Spinster heard herself asked for. There was the same man, seated in a light cart, behind the sorriest little specimen of horse-flesh she had ever seen.

"You didn't buy that hoss last night, did ye? No; wal, dunno's I blame ye," he began. "It wan't jest what you wanted, but here's one I got in trade over to Wilson's Corner, that you want. Light, good puller, sound, all right, only a little thin from poor keepin'. Come out and see her. Only fifteen dollars for this one."

"No," the Spinster said coldly, "I am not ready to buy a horse."

"You won't get another such chance," he urged. "Safe as a cat. Children can handle her. No backin' or runnin' away with her."

"Indeed!" and the Spinster began to grow

indignant. "I should say not. The poor animal hasn't life enough left to do any of those things. She couldn't stand up now if she weren't strapped to the thills. Why, if you were in the city you would be in danger of arrest for having the poor old thing in harness at all. And you ought to be, too."

Arrest was a word that the man did not enjoy. Possibly it called up sad reminiscences, for he urged the poor, staggering nag on without another word. When Hiram came from the post-office, he brought the information that the horse, which had been stolen the day before, had dropped dead half-way to the village.

That was only the beginning of the visits she had from men with horses of every kind and all prices. Although she had never once said to anybody that she intended or desired to buy a horse, every one with a horse to sell within a radius of ten miles made Spinster Farm the object of his devotion for weeks. Old horses

and young, fat horses and thin, gray horses and black, bay horses and roan, gentle and fierce, horses with and without tails, shaven and unshaven, gay and dejected, horses of every conceivable description were brought to her door, until life became almost a burden. And finally, in self-defence, the Spinster did buy, without advice from any one except the irrepressible Hiram. An elderly woman drove up one afternoon and said that she was about to move away, and would sell her old family horse, harness and carriage for fifty dollars in cash.

“You can’t get cheated,” said Hiram, who happened to be close by. “I’ve known that horse fifteen years. He was an old horse then, but he’ll last quite awhile longer. And the carriage is wuth all she asks for the outfit.”

So, worn out by the attentions of horse-traders, she told him to put Rosinante in the barn, while she went in to draw her check. Peggy drove the animal out that night.

“He’s all right,” she announced when she returned, rosy and smiling with exercise. “He has only one defect, and that is an impediment of speed. But he’ll do until I can get a pony with my egg-money.”

“He’ll die of old age before that,” returned the Spinster. But old Rosinante carried them patiently for many a pleasant mile before he finally laid himself peacefully down and yielded up the ghost; and so familiar did the inhabitants of Elysium become with the spectacle of the Spinster urging him gently to greater endeavour that, for the next year or two, whenever an old, superannuated beast was spoken of somebody would say, “Now that’s just the horse for that old maid over to Spinster Farm.”

But there came a time when matters were evened up. Just after the death of Rosinante a letter came from one of the Spinster’s friends. “We are going to travel for a year, and Mr. Wilton is going to reduce the stables. You

know Ladybird is my own horse and a fine one in every respect. Are you willing to take her and give her a good home as long as she lives, promising never to let her be sold?" To which the Spinster promptly and gladly assented. And when Ladybird came there were no invidious remarks about the old maid's horse except the occasional bet that she "would get run away with and smashed to flinders."

"Why do not more people dispose of their horses in that way?" she said one day. "I mean rich ones, of course. There is nothing more pitiful than to see a faithful old family horse that has been petted and cared for through all his useful life turned over to the mercy, or *un-mercy*, rather, of strangers whose one object is to get as much work as possible out of the poor old beast before he drops into his grave."

"A man who keeps his old horse after his day of usefulness is past, or gives it into a good

mistress's hands, as Ladybird has been given to you, is a Christian," said Hiram in reply, "I don't care what his creed an' doctrin' may be. 'A merciful man is merciful to his beast' is a Scriptur' verse that means just what it says; if the Lord had 'a meant to add 'as long's it's profitable' he'd 'a seen that it read so — tho' I ain't one o' them Christians that git out'n all responsibility by layin' all kinds o' evil to the ways o' Providence."

Vehicles, too, of all kinds, she was importuned to buy. One man, noted for his trading propensities, appeared every week that first Summer with something which he "had been told she wanted to buy." Perhaps it was a cow, perhaps a cart, perhaps a bicycle, perhaps a setting hen. There seemed no end to his persistency, and his visits, in season and out of season, became a standing joke in the family. Ploughs, harrows, calves, colts, pigs, turkeys, dump-carts, baby-carriages, second-hand bu-

reaus, stoves, old clocks, tinware, lawn-settees, strawberry plants and an open-air swing were only a few of the bargains he offered Spinster Farm.

Ladybird well repaid the tender care that was given her. She was the daintiest creature that ever drew a carriage, and insisted on having the details of her toilet attended to every day. If her hoofs were not properly cleaned and washed — and Hiram saw little need for carrying such niceties to an extreme — Ladybird would thrust her feet on the attention of Peggy, holding them up, one by one, for inspection, and saying plainly:

: “How can you expect me to give you my best service unless I am made clean and trig and in good fettle?” And so it happened almost daily that the Spinster herself sponged off Ladybird’s face and “pedicured her hoofs.” Her long mane and flowing tail, too, were as carefully brushed out as any lady’s hair, the mare



THE SPINSTER, AND LADYBIRD

showing her appreciation for these attentions by loving dabs of her velvet nose as well as by giving her best speed out on the road. For no one can get the best out of a horse without giving as even exchange a thorough care of the animal's needs. Frequent visits had to be made, too, to the blacksmith, where "under the spreading chestnut-tree, the village smithy stood." The Spinster used to mix the warm mash of bran and cornmeal seasoned with raw apples, and personally saw that there was a warm, thick bed of sawdust covered with litter at night, whereon Ladybird might rest easy after her ten or twenty mile drives.

"I wish, Auntie," said Peggy with a laugh, "your city friends could see you working over Ladybird some of these days. Wouldn't they be shocked? Item. 'The noted Miss Fleming, ex-school-committee, is spending the season at her country place in Elysium, doing her own stable-work.' "

“A far more healthful and useful — yes, and enjoyable — occupation than presiding over a club-meeting, or wading through a fashionable reception,” retorted the Spinster. “There is nothing better for worn-out nerves and tired-out heads than caring for a horse — though if Hiram were a trained stableman I should not do this. And Ladybird is so dainty and careful of herself that I would rather, by far, take care of her than wash Mrs. Jenkin Jones’s lap-dog, as she does, or comb fleas out of Miss Swampscott’s Angora cats.”

There were glorious drives in all weathers, ranging from the road to Shaker Village and on by Still River over Prospect Hill, where the delighted vision swept across a broad, fertile valley to the western mountain range, the landscape dotted by hamlets and villages and a city or two, to shorter ones through enchanting woods, the silence broken only by bird notes or the challenging squirrel, or perhaps a stray

fox or a deer, which stood quietly and gazed at the intruders until the soft pat of Ladybird's hoofs on the sandy road died away; for these wood-folk know at once whether the invader of their territory carries a gun. Mile after mile they rode among the "second growth" of slim, tall trees, until their souls were steeped in the filtering sunlight and visions of the heart of the woods stayed in the background of memory all evening, and until sleep — sound, refreshing, health-restoring sleep — closed their brain-shutters with the early darkness.

Is there a greater delight than to hold the reins over an intelligent horse that loves you and wants to please you? There is a subtle affinity between horse and driver that cannot be translated into words or made plain to the non-sympathetic reader. Almost from the start the Spinster found it unnecessary to draw the rein to guide Ladybird. If, a dozen rods before they reached a turn in the country road,

she said to her companion, " I believe I'll turn to the right out here; I want to see where that road goes," the mare would turn of her own accord with no pressure of the rein. Or if, when they approached the familiar turns near Spinster Farm after a long drive, some errand at the post-office claimed attention, the Spinster had only to say, " We won't turn off here, Ladybird; we've got to go to the post-office first," and the dear creature would forge ahead, never casting one longing look at the short way home. Never once did she show symptoms of weariness, but inevitably came home on a long, swinging trot, looking as fresh as if she had not left many a mile of dusty road behind her.

There was a day, for instance, when the Spinster and Peggy drove to a neighbouring town and railroad junction to meet the Professor, who had telephoned that he was coming out to luncheon. The Presiding Genius of the

kitchen having decided company luncheons to be both useless and unprofitable, they overcame a threatened domestic cataclysm by driving with him to the famous Groton Inn, which antedates the Revolution by some decades. As they drove away from the station the Spinster said:

“Now go over to the drug-store, Ladybird.” And when they drew up exactly in front of the apothecary’s shop in the centre of a big brick block, she could not refrain from a triumphant, “There, what do you think of that? And I did not guide her a particle.”

“Oh, come,” returned the Professor, “don’t ask me to believe that. You pulled on the rein ever so little.”

“I did not,” answered the Spinster.

“Then I require proof,” persisted the Professor. “I’ll believe it when I see it. Like the Missourian, you must show me.”

“Very well,” the Spinster replied. “We

are coming to a turn soon where I shall ask her to take the unfamiliar road. I'll show you; though I shall not be surprised if she fails me this time."

About half a mile up the highway one branch of the road goes to Groton and the other to Elysium Centre. Ladybird had always taken the latter, but when they came within a rod of the "Y" the Spinster dropped the reins loosely in her lap.

"Go to Groton this morning, Lady," she said.

The mare turned her head and looked back inquiringly; she wore no blinders and often communicated with her mistress in this way.

"Yes, go straight ahead to Groton," repeated the Spinster, with not a little doubt that Ladybird would understand. But the intelligent creature turned back and, with one longing look up the road to Elysium Centre, forged ahead toward Groton as if she had travelled that road for years.

“Well, I give up,” was the Professor’s comment. “I did not think it possible.”

Who can tell what goes on in the mind of a horse? When she first reached Spinster Farm the mare showed symptoms of fear at only one object — a white cow. Automobiles, motorcycles, electric cars, steam rollers, had no terrors for her, but, having lived in a great city since colthood, she had not encountered cows. Consequently she now looked at them askance, sidling and bridling in their presence as if they had been made of dynamite and were liable to explode at any moment. But there came a day when she was turned loose in the home lot, to wander among the short clover rowen at her will. Over in the next field near the fence, a white cow was tethered, and straight toward her went Ladybird, stopping now and then to snort disapproval. With the contented indifference of her kind, the cow chewed peacefully on, oblivious of Ladybird’s attentions;

seeing which, the mare went cautiously to the fence and gazed intently at the cow for three-quarters of an hour. Evidently she made up her equine mind that a cow was decidedly harmless, and probably useful, for after that period of close study Ladybird paid no further attention to the bovines of Elysium.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

“AWAY off out there in the country, what will you do for companionship?” asked her friends.

But the Spinster was then too tired to care whether she had neighbours or not. Fortunately, however, Elysium Centre, with its winding, tree-embowered street, was one of the few strongholds of old New England civilization which are left in this age of modern inventions. The few quaint old houses which clustered around the historic old “Common,” whereon nearly a hundred sturdy rebels of the King had gathered in Revolutionary days, still contained the remnants of old families which in their day had stood for all that was best in the

New England character. And the Spinster knew that she might look there for educated companionship when she chose. A few city people, too, who had eyes to discern and appreciate its charm, had discovered Elysium, and six months of the year these were quiet residents of delightful old places, rejuvenated and made pleasant and livable with books and music and cordial friendliness. Bordering her land on one side was a well-known literary man and his sprightly young wife, who was also writing a book. On the other side was the Francis family. Farther over were the Summer haunts of musicians and actors and editors and Nature-lovers, who came to Elysium for quiet and rest and the rejuvenation that cometh not with Summer dissipations and fine clothes. And hers was not by any means the only old house that had been developed and beautified into a modern residence. They were not without their mild Summer gaieties, either.

There was an annual dance, which was attended by the best people in all the towns around; the annual concert, given by artists from the cities who happened to be staying near by; and the occasional garden party, where gathered all the cultivated ladies of both town and country. There was plenty of informal visiting and the friendly neighbourliness which comes of meeting the same people day after day, driving about the country hatless and without ceremony. There were among the year-round residents, too, as in most of the older New England homes, educated and delightful ladies of quaint, old-fashioned charm, who kept up with the march of the outside world by means of the abundant reading-matter which penetrated Elysium Centre and passed from family to family until it was nearly worn out.

Best of all were the Francis family, of whom the Spinster had bought the old house where Mrs. Francis had been born, and where she

had grown up into a sweet, shy, quaint creature, resembling nothing so much as the dainty wild rose which grew so abundantly in the pasture, blooming most delicately beautiful where no eye saw it. "Micky" their actress friend named her, in a spirit of mischievous perversity, and as "Micky" the Spinster loved to think of her, because the sobriquet was so absolutely inappropriate.

Mr. Francis was an innate gentleman, with the perfect breeding which comes from the clean, white soul of a true man. These two, with little Dolly Francis, a quaint, unusual child of six, made up the Francis family, who at first owned the land beyond hers, occupying a handsome house filled with beautiful and rare old Colonial furniture and china. But, as the fame of Elysium spread, this house was sold to some friends of the Spinster's, who had responded to the fast-spreading promptings to return to the country for a home.

The old west pasture was reserved, however, and in this, well back from the road, the Francis family made themselves a home after their own ideas. "Pasture-Holm" was some distance back from the highway, and approached by an old cart-road bordered with goldenrod and blueberry and sumach and wild roses. Many of their townspeople, who were blessed with an infinite capacity for understanding their neighbour's needs better than their own, wondered at this choice of location, some even going so far as to remonstrate, but Mr. Francis only listened courteously and went on with his plans.

It was a long, low-pitch-roofed house of two stories, placed picturesquely in the middle of a group of monstrous chestnut and oak and walnut trees. There was no architect but themselves, and consequently no "Queen Anne front with Mary Anne back." In fact it was impossible to tell which was the back of the

house when it was done, for two opposite corners, on the northwest and southwest, were exactly alike, each having its square piazza, big front door and its side lights. The living-rooms, even to the chambers, were all on the first floor, and designed to simplify the problem of housekeeping as much as possible. The great main living-room, thirty feet long, had windows opening on three sides, looking across billows of wild shrubbery to hill and vale, south, west and north. In this room were gathered many curious souvenirs and pieces of handsome furniture that had come down from Colonial ancestors. Here was a desk that once belonged to Oliver Holden, composer of that immortal tune "Coronation." Here were quaint old hanging-lamps of a previous century; a corner cupboard that dated back more than a hundred years; a corner seat made from a church pew that had seen ecclesiastical service in the middle of the eighteenth century;

a Heppelwhite sofa brought over from England when the land was young. For the Francis's were artistic to the finger-tips and had the advantage of combining with artistic taste a sure knowledge of what was "fit and proper," and the inheritance of many beautiful things. A big old-fashioned brick fireplace in the middle made the heart of this home bright and cosy in dull weather, and the room soon became a centre for the best of Elysium folk, native and foreign, artists and *literati* from everywhere, as well as their own kith and kin.

"Because they are so simple and sincere in themselves," the Spinster said in answer to Peggy's "Why?" "They are thorough gentlefolk, with the magic art of putting every one at his or her best who comes within their radius. There is no sham, no artifice; in them we have something more than good neighbours — we have thoroughly dependable friends for life."

On that old "Common," too, stood a historic church.

"We hear a great deal about the decadence of the country church in these later days. Doubtless with the spread of literature (good and bad), the advent of cheap amusements, the Sunday newspaper, the trains and trolleys that take us in an hour into the city, the church is not so well patronized as it used to be when people had no other way of meeting, except now and then at the country store and post-office," wrote the Spinster to the Professor.

"I question whether it was so much a pure religion undefiled that took our grandmothers to church with all their families to stay through two services, with Sunday-school between and an hour for visiting with the rest of the townsfolk, as it was the need of social recreation and some sort of mental stimulus, which the church alone could supply in those days. Think a minute. If you had no club, no newspaper,

Sunday or daily, no trains, no trolleys, no telephones, no telegraphs, no automobiles, no social connections besides those the church afforded, wouldn't you jump at the chance of going to church every Sunday, taking your luncheon and the children and staying all day? Methinks I hear a 'Yes.'

"Still, the country church is not so dead as many people imagine it to be. Here in Elysium, for instance, there are several churches open every Sunday. More than there ought to be? Well, let it go at that; still there are a goodly number of churchgoing people out here. Four churches keep most of the people down at the 'Village,' which is the enterprising end of the town; but up here at the old Centre we have a big white church that was built before the Revolution, and in front of which eighty men mustered for the Concord fight. It has a beautiful great mahogany pulpit and a basket Bible given by Madam Lydia Hancock,

the beloved aunt of Governor Hancock. In this old church have preached several stanch old ministers whose names stood for all that was noble a half or a whole century ago. Dr. Seth Chandler, 'Elder' Whitney and others were well known throughout Massachusetts in their day. Oliver Holden, who composed 'Coronation,' worshipped in it when a boy, and who shall say how much of inspiration the old church furnished him? And now, beside the pulpit hangs a beautiful bronze tablet to his memory.

"Well, perhaps the congregation has shrunk since then, so that it is hard work to keep up the services; but still the few who love the old church are not willing to see its doors closed, and so, by hook or by crook, we manage to keep a supply. As usual, it is the women who are doing most of it. A few of the stanch descendants of those 'gone before,' aided by a few more 'new people,' have formed a Woman's

Alliance and are creating fresh interest through its work. Thus they serve two ends: they keep up the services, and they get what an old teacher of mine used to designate as 'religious festivities and ecclesiastical dissipation.' For their meetings every two weeks have drawn the women of this part of the town together into bonds of friendship and mutual esteem as nothing has done for years. They are raising the money necessary to eke out the small fund belonging to the church, cultivating the spirit of neighbourliness and keeping up the old traditions. Isn't this worth while? But they have done more than this. A month or two ago, when funds got low and some little indebtedness was troubling the parish committee, it was proposed to close the church until warm weather. No! the women voted against it. They said:

" 'If we can't pay a preacher, we'll carry on the meetings ourselves.' And they did.

The Sundays were apportioned among the leading women. Each one takes charge of the services, selecting all the hymns, arranging for special solo services, finding the best sermon she can and reading it clearly and distinctly, even making the prayer, if necessary. The services have been of the deepest interest and have 'drawn' outsiders, who, if they did not come to scoff, remained to pray, and seemed to like it.

"When you go to church again, walking along the fine Back Bay street, or whirled along in trolleys, just give a thought to how it would seem to be out in the country, walking over the grassy paths that converge at the old church in the centre of Elysium. There will be just a tinge of green showing up through the brown of winter-killed carpets. Here and there, if you take the short cut through the pasture, there will be a cluster of green, waxy leaves with arbutus buds shining up at you.

Overhead, on near-by apple-trees, from elm-tops, everywhere, birds will be singing and calling — the blackbird's 'okale-e-e-e,' the robin's cheery note, the bluebird's melody, the meadow-lark, the freshly arrived oriole. Buds will be shaking out on the shrubs and trees; fleecy, white clouds will be gathered on the wide horizon; across the valley you will note the splendid white tower of the Groton School; on the other side you will note the deep blue of Wachusett; now and then will come the clarion call of Sir Chanticleer as he musters his hens beside him. And everywhere will be the Sabbath stillness, such as you will remember to have been a part of Sunday when you were a boy in the country, or at your grandfather's house.

"Then you will come out into the pretty winding road again, only to turn aside into another short cut, which will take you into the old cemetery, where you may be early

enough to linger and read some quaint old epitaphs on stones of a hundred years ago. Anyhow you will walk softly under great trees by the graves of Revolutionary soldiers and heroes of the Civil War and past the tombs of first settlers who were here long before the old church was built; you will think to yourself how pleasant a place to lie, when 'life's fitful fever' is over; and then you will come out at the church. You will go in, and even if there are but few in the audience and there is no vested choir and no great orator in the pulpit, you will feel the solemn hush of the place, and call to mind the hundreds of good people who have worshipped there a century and a half; and you will feel that there may be such a thing after all as the presence there of the spirits, good, gentle, helpful spirits of 'just men made perfect.' And you will not think much about the sermon, anyway; you will just be content to sit in the Presence, and to let the silent

influences permeate your soul, so that you can go out again by and by, rested body and soul, ready to take up life's burdens and pleasures once more, serene and strong and hopeful. For isn't this the true worship of the spirit?

“J. F.”

CHAPTER V

PEGGY'S AFFAIRS

PEGGY was twenty, with big brown eyes and light, abundant hair. In place of college, she had chosen the art school and was looking forward to a career. As usual, her friends did not take to this idea any too seriously; who ever does think much about a girl's career when she is twenty and rather more than commonly attractive? Robert Graves, who was twenty-five, through college and already in a minor editorial capacity on a daily paper, certainly did not. On the contrary, he took the ordinary man's view of the subject. From the first time he saw Peggy, when she had come home from school with one of his sisters, he

had looked upon her as the most feminine of all the girls he knew, — which meant, although he did not put it that way as yet, that she was the one woman in the world for him.

It was because of this feeling, all unconsciously, that he did not approve the project of her going out into the country to live; or that he did not feel that she was meant by Mother Nature for a “career.” And they sometimes disputed this point together, when he would hint at her shortcomings in the pursuit of Art, whereupon Peggy would get very angry and feel that genius was seldom appreciated at its true worth. And the Spinster looked on, highly amused; for she was old enough to realize that this was only a part of “the way of a man with a maid,” and trusted God for the rest, holding her tongue meanwhile.

At first, Robert came out frequently and had to admit the beauty and restfulness of Elysium

Centre; but the day came when he was ordered to New York for his paper, and good journalist as he was, with the hope of rising in his profession, he was obliged to go. He came out one Sunday with the Professor for a last visit with Peggy. When dinner was over the two young people strolled away by themselves, up into the chestnut pasture, and he told her about it.

“And you are going to bury yourself in hot old New York all this divine summer?” she asked. “I’m so sorry — for you,” she added, seeing the look in his eyes.

“Peggy, won’t you come too?” he asked impulsively.

“Oh, no,” she answered quickly. “I — I couldn’t.”

“Yes, you could,” he answered. “Come, Peggy, I want you. I — I think I love you,” he hesitated, not knowing exactly how to put it.

“You *think* you do?” she retorted with

spirit. "Well, I like that. The man I — well, he'll know; he won't think. No, no, of course not."

She rose from the log where they had been sitting. "Come, let's go back to the house. It's getting too warm out here." And she started at a swinging gait.

"Peggy, dear, won't you hear me?" he began, trying to keep up with her. "I do love you. Of course I do. Won't you?"

"You *think* you do," she said over her shoulder. "You'd better wait until you find out." And she sped on, paying no further heed to his protestations. Neither did she give him another chance for a word alone, not even when train-time came, and the two men went away.

But a week later, she had a note from Robert's sister:

"Dear Peggy," it began. "You'll be surprised, I know, to hear that I am in Bayside,

a little out of New York for the summer. Robert has been promoted on his paper and is now New York correspondent, which is a very fine thing indeed, if you did but know it. And as mother and I had no particular plans for the summer, she came right over here and took a cottage at this little place on Long Island, close to the water. You must come over and stay awhile with us, later on." ("Not if I know it," murmured Peggy to herself, for she still resented Robert's unique way of declaring himself.) "Write me all about your venture out there in the wilds of Massachusetts. Aren't you sick of it? Robert said you would be tired to death of it before summer was half over. Are you?

"Yours devotedly,

"SALLIE."

"Oh, he *did*, did he?" she said to herself as she folded the letter away. "He thinks

I will go to New York simply because I shall be dying of ennui; and he *thinks* he loves me, does he? Well, he'll find out for certain, *I* think." But she sat down and wrote a long letter to her friend. Perhaps she knew that her letter would be read by others than Sallie.

"Dear Sallie," she began.

"I can't begin to tell you how interesting, how peaceful, how inspiring these particular 'wilds of Massachusetts' are. I suppose you would laugh if I told you that I look down upon your little seaside cottage half an hour from New York. I run down to Boston occasionally, and I feel, coming back into this charming place, like a disembodied soul just entering Paradise. And Boston in summer is not half so bad as New York. We are high up among the hills, you know, and when the rest of the country is parched we are cool and comfortable. Every time I get off a train and step out into the clean, fresh country I feel like

singing. The other night I came up from the station with Hiram. He drove around the longest way home over a beautiful road, fringed with alders and young birches. We had a good view of the distant hills, too, and as I watched the setting sun sift his sprays of yellow gold-dust down the mountain-sides, and the faint, floating clouds over the rosy hilltops, I just drew a long breath. And Hiram looked at me and said:

“ ‘ Wal, I guess you like it up here all right.’ And I ‘ guess ’ I do.

“ I have been here only two months yet, and am in love with the bright, picturesque mornings, the still, warm noons, the lovely sunset views. There is a ‘ bosky knoll ’ a little way from the house and I go up there almost every night to watch the sun go down. I am sitting up there now, writing to you — with my best fountain pen, which, for a wonder, goes. I haven’t lost my temper once since I started.

“ There are myriads of birds around here and they are singing, singing, singing all day long. They begin long before you awake in the morning and keep it up until after the sun goes down at night. The oriole sits on the nearest elm and says his vespers; the teacher-bird perches on a bush up in the pasture and fires off his musical volley; the robin calls across the meadow to his confrères. Then there is the catbird. Do you know him? — the Northern mocking-bird? We have one nesting up here and he lingers around this old pasture and sings his changeful, mocking, fascinating song all day. Now you think it is a robin, now a pewee, now the oriole, now a whippoorwill; and then you get all mixed up and cannot unravel the tangle of song he is reeling off. His voice is a little rusty yet, as if he had not got the full use of his vocal organs; but the winter of his discontent is ended and he, like the rest of us, is glad to be back in Elysium

again with its growing grass and fast unfolding apple-blossoms. The brown thrasher is here too, flying from thicket to thicket, trying to make up his mind which is the better building lot. I saw a hundred blackbirds in one flock one day, flying across the sunlit sky in one mass, uttering their guttural 'chut, chut, chut,' and alighting, all of them, in a big elm-tree; then they combined in such a chorus of 'o-ka-lee-ee-ees' as you never heard. And what do you say to counting twenty-two scarlet tanagers on the ground, just over the fence in a field of ploughed ground? That's what we did; and the farmer could not see that their presence there among the grubs, before he planted his potatoes, meant good and not ill to him. They were the most gorgeous sight ever, and when a woman has once seen them like that, or a big flock of bluebirds, or fed a bunch of blue jays all winter, do you think she is going to wear any part of them on her hat? Perish the thought.

“ A whippoorwill has made his appearance, too, in a neighbouring bit of wood. Toward night, sitting on the piazza, looking off south and listening to the frogs’ piping, and the bird-tweeting, and the distant voices of playing children, you can hear him earnestly and vociferously entreating that punishment befitting his crime be meted out to him. I like it myself, and said so to a bright player lady who used to board here before we found the place; but she held up horrified hands.

“ ‘ Like it? Heavens!’ she cried. ‘ Why, when I used to stay at your house, he would establish himself at bedtime in that great vase elm at the corner of the house, within twenty feet of my bed, and cry “ Whippoorwill, whippoorwill,” at the rate of forty-five a minute and keep it up without ceasing until the sun rose. Why, I’ve come within one of committing suicide in my time, just because of your dear old whippoorwill.’

“And, speaking of the piazza at twilight, a big young deer showed himself the other night as we sat there, and only a few rods away, across the orchard. Evidently he was intending to come across the yard, but some one cried out, ‘Oh, see that deer!’ and away he flew, two rods at a leap.

“I wish you were here. And thank you for your invitation to visit you. I hardly think Aunt Janet could spare me at present. You would be surprised to see that woman! Instead of the dignified and rather severe mistress of a Boston house, she is just a plain country woman, taking hold of all sorts of work as if she enjoyed it, — as I know she does.

“It is my especial task to keep the vases and pitchers full of wild (or any other) flowers. Also, to make the acquaintance of the neighbours. No, there are not many. But I like them all so much. The nearest are some people who have a fine old mansion known as Thornton

Lodge. The master is known as 'Square' Thornton, although 'Round' would be a far more appropriate title. Besides him, there are his wife and two maiden daughters, — and *Jack!* I confess to a profound admiration for Jack. No; I don't know him, — yet. But I shall. But this is too long a letter, and I must hurry it over to the post-office in the general store, or it will be too late for the last mail. So with a loving good-bye, I am

“Your old chum,

“PEGGY.”

CHAPTER VI

MAKING OVER THE HOUSE

WITH a telephone in the old house that had stood so many years before railroads and steamboats were invented, and plenty of magazines and daily papers and new books, they found themselves still close to town. No one need be isolated to-day, unless by choice. "Twenty-five acres, more or less," the deed to Spinster Farm said, but they would have told you infinitely more; for did it not bring room for quiet, for reading new books, for thinking one's own thoughts, for open-air living?

But the Spinster soon found that attractive as the old house was in many ways, it lacked the small conveniences of daily life that are a

matter of course in more modern establishments. This was no disappointment, however, for in her anticipations of an old country house had been included the remodelling to suit her own ideas. Not for the world would she have destroyed the quaint, old-time charm of the house. The front was in excellent repair, and it seemed such a pity to change its dignified exterior that she took warning from certain bay-windowed and betowered old houses and refrained from architectural incongruities. Mullioned windows and ornate balconies and gingerbread trimmings have their uses on certain types of modern houses, but the square, pre-Revolutionary mansions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are as painful a spectacle when subjected to these "adornments" as the woman of seventy is arrayed in the garb of sweet sixteen. The mansion was originally built with a two-story front and a long roof sloping down to one story at the back, an

ingenious style of architecture designed, in the days of the Georges, especially to defeat the tax which had been imposed on the colonists by the British Parliament, by which they must pay a bounty on two-story houses — along with their tea. But, generations ago, this sloping roof had been changed so that the house was square, and there were two complete stories, besides the attic, which clustered about the great central chimney. Still, there was need of more convenient arrangement within, and twenty years had elapsed since the old clapboards had tasted fresh paint. The entire group of farm-buildings was harmonious, with their low-pitched roofs and solid style and soft gray time-stain, with the exception of one new barn, high and narrow, with a steep roof. This the Spinster had drawn over and attached to the main body of the house. Then she had the roof lowered and a twenty-foot veranda with massive pillars built out where the “ell”

came on, enlarging and improving the whole establishment. An old pantry and dark passageway were turned into a square hall that opened on this west piazza, and it was soon a mooted question which was the more attractive, the old-time front door with its knocker and its ancient flagstones or the inviting, glass-topped one from the wide west veranda.

While these repairs were going on, like all dwellers in rural neighbourhoods, the entire district was agog. Not being on terms of sufficient intimacy to ask questions of the Spinster or Peggy, they speculated among themselves, often within earshot of the house.

“What *is* that woman going to do?”

“Well, well! if she ain’t gone and moved the hoss-barn up to the house. Now, what is her idee in that?”

“That peaked roof towerin’ above the house itself is a sight, ain’t it?”

When the roof was finally lowered they began

to take heart again. "Don't look so bad now, does it? Shouldn't wonder if she made quite a place on't after all."

Some weeks elapsed between the carpenters and the painter — weeks that kept them guessing. When work was fairly begun with the paint-brushes, she could hear again:

"Now, what did she have it yaller for? Some o' these new shades o' green would look a sight better." Peggy sometimes wondered if the inhabitants would have been pleased had her aunt seen fit to adorn the whole establishment with the twelve gallons of bright "dump-cart" blue that were shipped by mistake in place of the Colonial yellow ordered. One woman especially delighted them as she was driving up the hill with a friend:

"Yes; she took an' moved the hoss-barn over an' made a' ell of it. Yes; looks real well, but if it'd 'a' be'n me, now, I'd 'a' moved it round the other way an' took the old part for

the ell; an' I should 'a' painted the hull set o' buildin's salmon pink an' trimmed 'em with two shades o' green, like one I see over to Pleasant Town."

But when it was all done, and the old house stood forth in its shining coat of Colonial yellow with white trimmings and green blinds, the neighbours were much pleased and agreed that it was "one of the show places of the town."

A house takes its atmosphere from those who live in it, and De Horte Mansion, as it used to be called, had been the home for several generations of gentle, peaceful folk. There was an air of brooding peace about the place that first March day, and restfulness has been its most blessed attribute ever since. Whether you wander about the grounds or swing from a hammock under the apple-trees, whether you sit by the open fire in evening or look out from the cool living-room in the day, the soothing silence quiets your nerves, while at night the

great soft darkness brings a sense of protection and healing and confidence in the to-morrows-to-be that rejuvenates and strengthens the weary brain. It is then you appreciate the quotation, "When silence like a poultice comes to heal the blows of sound;" that is, if you have known the full meaning of that phrase, "the blows of sound."

The old-fashioned rooms she had found easy to furnish, her familiar belongings fitting in as if they had always been there. The Sheraton chairs and sofas, with her prettiest escritoire, looked as though they had been especially designed for the low-ceiled "keeping-room," which she made still more attractive by having a set of book-shelves built across one end. Her piano and two other book-cases took away the "best parlour" air and made this a thoroughly delightful spot. The old dining-room, too, had its corner-shelves built in for books; and with still other well-filled book-

cases, its broad, comfortable couch heaped with pillows and its open fireplace, it came soon to be what it was called, the "living-room." Here they sat through the chilly evenings and rainy days, when the piazza and Summer-house were too cool, and here, indeed, was the heart of the home. For before they had dwelt three months in Elysium, Spinster Farm had come to seem the truer embodiment of that magic word, "home," than any other spot they had ever known. To the real nature-lover, no matter how fine and costly, the city apartment can never be more than a makeshift. And the Spinster early came to the conclusion that she would never occupy one unless it should be for the coldest Winter months.

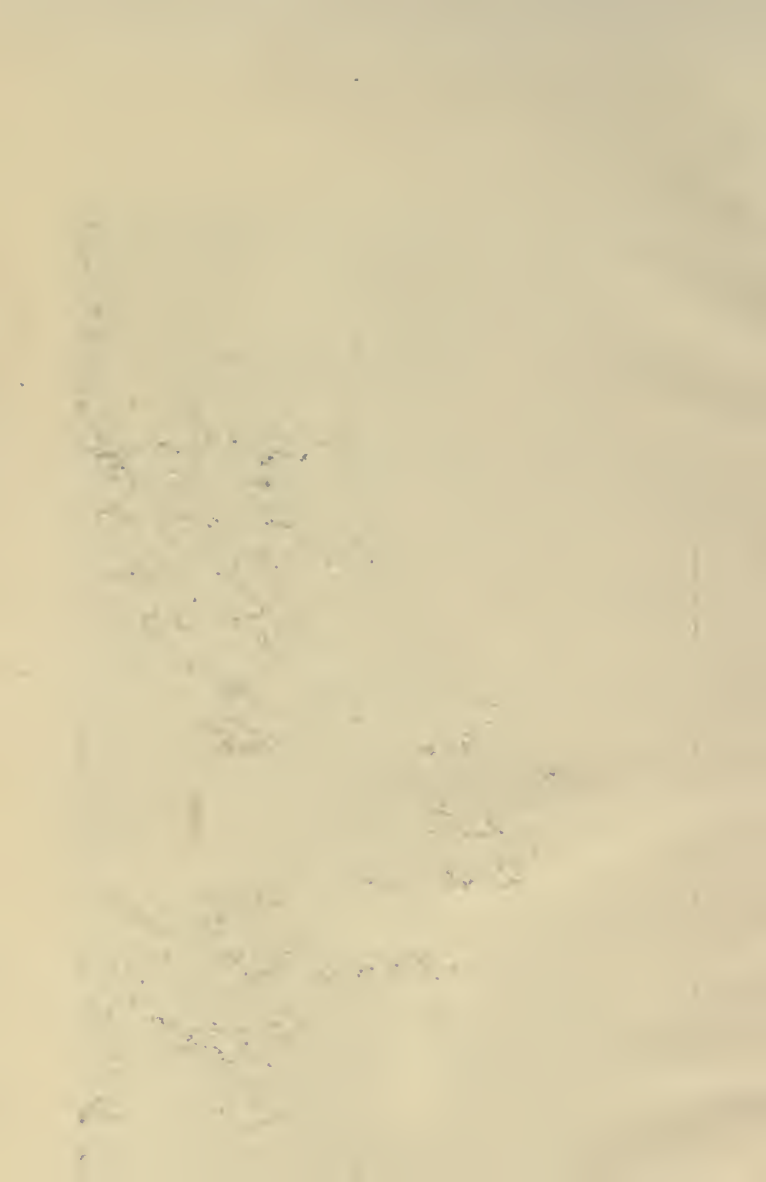
One of the most satisfactory things the Spinster built was the Summer-house, a simple, low-roofed structure, with shingled pillars, set under the apple-boughs in the orchard, in a

spot seemingly designed for it especially by Mother Nature. The entire cost of this affair, ten by twenty feet, was less than twenty dollars. Peggy planted woodbine at every one of the six shingled posts, and the addition of an old steamer-chair, with two or three rockers and some rugs, made the place, under whispering apple-boughs and in the midst of interminable bird concerts and soft breezes, the real centre of Spinster Farm in Summer weather.

They had already removed various old fences, half decayed and utterly ugly, and taken down the one five feet high around the old farmyard, throwing that space into the grounds; they had cleared up the tangled rose-garden, re-setting the old York and Lancaster, the blush, the little Scotch and the moss and thornless and yellow roses in rows. They found a white rose-bush at the house-corner which had been set out by a bride in 1829, and which had blossomed sixty consecutive years for her, during



THE SUMMER - HOUSE IN THE ORCHARD



which period the hearthstone never grew cold; but none of the roses were more beautiful than the brilliant, low-growing "grass-roses," which vie in hue and fragrance with their proud cousin, the American Beauty, but which do not respond to transplanting and tender care, preferring to linger in lowly corners or in the grass by the roadside. And through half the Summer Peggy made it a rule to put a fresh-picked half-blown, dewy grass-rose beside her aunt's plate at the breakfast-table, where it brought the elder woman its dainty "good-morrow" through many a week of bright good-mornings.

CHAPTER VII

THE SERVANT QUESTION

UP to the moment of going into Elysium, in sixteen years of housekeeping no servant had ever left Janet Fleming voluntarily. And when people said, "You will never be able to keep a maid out there. They just won't stay in the country," the Spinster only laughed and congratulated herself on Mary Jane.

It had been the custom of this particular kitchen queen to say in the heat of Summer, in the Autumn rains, at the time of the advent of plumbers in Winter, in the slush of Spring; in fact, at all seasons:

"Oh, Miss, I want you to move out into the country. That is the only place to live." Whereupon the Spinster would ask:

“ Would you go with me, Mary Jane — and stay? ”

“ Sure and I would,” was her invariable reply. “ The country is the only place for me. I would never, never leave you if you would only buy a farm.”

With that oft-repeated assurance, could the Spinster not afford to hug herself in the security of the domestic problem? For Mary Jane had scolded interminably about the small kitchen, the incorrigible range, the close proximity of the noisy street, the wrong location of the refrigerator, the height of the set tubs from the floor, the pitch of the cellar-stairs, the heat in Summer, the cold in Winter — in short, about every possible item connected with house-keeping in the city — so that the Spinster felt sure she would welcome the change into the great roomy kitchen on the farm.

When they returned from that first visit to Elysium the Spinster went into the kitchen.

"Well, Mary Jane, you are going to have your wish now. I have bought a farm."

"Miss Fleming! You are not going to move?" and she dropped one of Peggy's prettiest dishes in her astonishment.

"Yes; next month," the Spinster responded.

"Miss Fleming!" and Mary Jane sank aghast into her rocking-chair. "Are you going to leave this lovely house, this beautiful kitchen with all its conveniences, and go off into one of those old country-houses, without hot and cold water and set tubs and electric lights and telephones and steam heat and electric bells? Oh, Miss Fleming!" And she fairly moaned in her agony.

"Why, Mary Jane," began the Spinster feebly, "you've always said you wanted to go. I'm counting on you. I thought you'd like it."

But the handmaiden's displeasure gathered momentum as her wails grew louder. "I know all about those places," she groaned;

“damp, mouldy, rotten old holes. You’ll have to be getting a new girl now, for sure.”

“Now, Mary Jane, don’t be hasty,” pleaded the Spinster, “take time to think it all over. Don’t decide to-night,” and she fled incontinently up the front stairway.

A week later the oracle opened its lips again: “I’ve decided to go out to the place with you and help start things going. But I sha’n’t stay.”

The Spinster was dumbly grateful, on the principle that the fewest words said, the least friction. Meanwhile she and Peggy planned for the country place. There was a tiny bedroom off the kitchen, which they thought Mary Jane would like, but she was non-committal. “I presume it’ll do,” she said; “but you know I’m only there a few days, anyhow.”

But once fairly there, bag and baggage, when the Spinster directed the men to set Mary Jane’s little bed in this little room, she sniffed

her contempt. "You can have it put up there if you want to," she snapped out, "but I go back to Boston to-night."

Perhaps, as some contend, half the trouble between mistress and maid comes from the lack of firmness on the part of the former. But how is one to be firm with one's own maid forty miles from an intelligence office, and the house just as the movers left it? Theory and practice walk in divergent paths sometimes, when it is necessary to call Discretion in to help.

"Well, then, will you take the little room off the dining-room — the one I had planned to use for my writing-den?" asked the Spinster, slavishly.

"I will look at it," was the lofty reply. But, no, that would not do. It was damp, cold, unhealthy, unsafe. She would catch rheumatism. She would have diphtheria. A Man would get into her window at night. They all

would be murdered in their beds. She tramped off up-stairs and came back. There was a long, pleasant west chamber looking out on the mountains, which the Spinster had set her heart on the first time she had seen it. This Mary Jane chose and would not be denied.

“But I want that,” objected Miss Fleming, “I will take Peggy in with me and give her the couch, and you may have the smaller room opening beyond, the one I had intended for her.”

“And have to go through your room to get to it?” she asked, with a snort of disdain. “It isn’t my place to be going over the front stairs. There is only one way. I will go back to Boston.” Of course, they should have given her a month’s pay in advance and allowed her to depart at once, but the Spinster was still feeble and unfitted to cope with the situation. She gave up the coveted room and took another, and Mary Jane stayed to wield authority all Summer. Not peacefully and contentedly.

Oh, no. She gave notice regularly every fortnight, a performance which seemed to relieve her mind, and to which the Spinster paid no attention whatever. She had her pleasant days when all went merry as the proverbial marriage bell. But that was when neither the Spinster nor Peggy presumed to dictate or meddle with kitchen affairs.

There was the day when the Spinster rashly presumed to buy a tin dipper. Now a two-quart tin water-dipper is seemingly an inoffensive and useful object, but when the Spinster came home and deposited a new one on the kitchen-table, the smile she had looked for as a just reward proved to be a frown, one of Mary Jane's sourest.

"What did you buy that thing for?" she demanded.

"Why, to dip water with," answered the Spinster, in conciliatory accents. "I thought it would save steps for you."

"Huh!" was the reply.

Four days later Peggy happened to go into the pantry and there lay the tin dipper still wearing its accumulation of store dust.

"You don't seem to care for your new dipper," she remarked, pleasantly, but with poor judgment. "Why don't you get it out and use it?"

"We didn't want that dipper. We didn't need that dipper. We won't use that dipper," Mary Jane began wildly. "Why should your aunt meddle with my kitchen anyway?" and then followed such a torrent of words that the Spinster, in the doorway, was fain to beat a retreat and flee to the blackberry patch on the farthest edge of the farm, where the southwest wind, the soft blue Summer skies and the meadow-lark on the fence combined to bury the servant problem in deep oblivion; but it was three days before Mary Jane condescended to speak again of her own free will.

There were other times when the Spinster

forgot her lesson and bought more kitchen accessories, only to get soundly berated, a new dust-pan nearly disrupting their relations at one time. And she recalled the remark of a friend, who had suffered, also:

“The servant problem?” this woman had said one day. “The only way I can solve it is to go without any maid for awhile to rest my head; then I get one again to rest my heels. I don’t know which is worse!”

But there was always the big orchard at Spinster Farm, where one could drop all worries and draw upon the ineffable sympathies of Nature; and it is wonderful how small indoor worries and unpleasantnesses are when you take them into the big outdoors.

Mary Jane loved Nature, too. Often she would leave her dish-washing or her ironing in the midst of those duties and, calling Pomp, her favourite cat, trail off across the orchard into the west pasture and sit awhile under the group

of old chestnut-trees, drinking in the peace and calmness of the Summer day. When she came back her soul, too, was calm and sunshiny — even if her irons were cold. And so they got on. After all, it is infinitely more important that the temper should be cool than that the dish-water be hot. Mary Jane and the Spinster both comprehended this great psychological truth and so lived through their small difficulties. Sometimes Peggy went with Mary Jane and they took long rambles in the woods, where no fern or flower escaped their notice, for to Peggy all woods are enchanted.

But when the short days came on Mary Jane's notice-giving propensities grew on her until a time when the Spinster astonished her by saying :

“ Very well. This time I accept your notice. I shall get another girl.”

“ I hope you will,” was her answer, “ for I really must get back to Boston. I've stayed out here too long.”

Three weeks later she was informed that another girl was coming.

“Miss Fleming!” she cried, “I never thought you would turn me outdoors after the long time I’ve served you.” In vain she was reminded that she had given notice of her own free will and that three weeks had elapsed since it had been accepted. No, the Spinster was cruel and heartless. Mary Jane had no place to go and was being turned from the door into a cold and unsympathetic world. The Spinster felt almost an inhuman monster when the weeping maid was finally carried from the yard, calling to the cat in a voice broken by sobs:

“Good-bye, old Pomp. I shall never see you again.”

Of course there have been others, and must continue to be others till the crack o’ doom. There was the girl who boiled the potatoes in the teakettle, and the elderly person who was miserable and irresponsible without a

certain "headache powder," and the girl who had been on the stage as chorus singer and who bewitched every man who came near. There was the girl who would not stay because she could not have the dining-room to entertain company in, and the girl who had never carried a key to the back door and would not begin now, and the woman just out from an insane asylum. And then the Spinster took some of the valuable advice that had been so freely proffered and tried having a woman with a baby.

"She would be so contented, you know." She was. Her contentment was so great that after the infant had broken half the best dishes, fed the hens with cake and sweetmeats until they had dyspepsia, and screamed with colic nights until the family were all fit inmates for the insane asylum, and the Spinster had told her that they, too, must part company, the girl calmly replied that the place suited her, she had no desire to change, and, in short, would not go.

It took Miss Fleming a bad half-hour to convince her that she could not, would not and should not keep her any longer. And so Alice, too, went the way of all the rest, but cheerfully, and promising to take Johnnie some day and come back to pay them a visit.

Is there anywhere among civilized people a household exempt from these experiences, or exalted above the need of discussing the servant question? Newspapers give much space to it; the drawing-room selects it as fit for polite conversation; even the pulpit tackles it upon occasion. We are always reading about underpaid servant-girls and hard task-mistresses, and in some cities housemaids are forming into unions for protection and "relief." But we seldom see a word on the housewife's side. No one seems ever to propound the idea that the skilled housekeeper should be classed with skilled labour. Nobody proposes any schemes for the protection of employers against incom-

petence, unfaithfulness, dishonesty, uncleanliness, and a hundred other faults.

“You can’t expect perfection at three or four dollars a week,” said the Professor, “and you should reflect that if your maid had brains enough to bring good judgment and competency and education into your kitchen she would not be there at all.”

But then, he was a mere man; and how can men know?

CHAPTER VIII

PEGGY'S AFFAIRS AGAIN

DEAR SALLIE: — Tired of country life? Never. Why, it is all so simple and natural and satisfying that it is just like a poem; you wonder why you didn't realize and live it before. When I marry I shall settle right down on a farm! So you see you need not expect me as an inmate of your seaside cottage at present. I know something of life at the beach, and although one could never tire of the sea, — I'll admit so much, — to me there is not a tenth part of the charm of the country up here. Up here in this lovely summer we read of the dreadful heat in and around New York; and every time I pity you from the bottom of my heart. We

sleep with blankets over us every night. We stroll about in the early and latter parts of the day and stay in cool shady rooms while the sun is high. In our big, square house, with windows open everywhere, there is always a cool corner. There is plenty to read, with sewing and embroidery and writing to take up our time, and a refreshing nap to be taken in the afternoon; for nobody calls here during the warmest hours. I've done a lot of things to-day, although outside the mercury runs up between eighty and ninety. Yet, I haven't once thought of the heat.

By and by we shall go out for a ride, with The Good Thing prancing gaily along and champing her bit. She will step proudly forth with her long, swinging stride that carries us so smoothly and swiftly, and will look from side to side, her ears pointed forward and nose in air, to see if perchance there may not be something, a lone cornstalk with waving plumage,

a yellow dog in the bushes, even her own shadow, that she may pretend to shy at; but she will scare no one, for we know her and that a word will bring her to her senses; she would no more run or kick or do any real damage than if she were the pokiest of horses. She loves to alarm us, but when she has done this she will stop and look out of the corner of her eye, with such a roguish look that we have no heart to scold her.

I went up to her stable a few moments ago, just for a bit of conversation with her; for The Good Thing is a part of the family and we all go up to exchange courtesies with her now and then. On our part we offer, in emulation of Eugene Field's restaurant order, an apple and a few kind words. On hers there is a soft velvet nose thrust out, a big brown head laid affectionately over our shoulders, a soft whimper. Don't tell me a horse don't know!

What do you suppose I gave her this last

time I called at her big, roomy box stall? An egg. What for? Why, to eat, of course. Didn't you know a horse would eat eggs? Well, I didn't until one day when we discovered that a pullet seemed to be laying in the manger where The Good Thing eats. Day after day the pullet squatted on her nest, oblivious to all worldly sights and sounds; but we never could find the egg. And then, mistrusting her honesty, we offered The Good Thing a fresh egg. She simply opened her lips, took it in, and rolling her eyes heavenward, swallowed it, shell and all. Since that day she has consumed scores of them. Good horsemen say that is why her coat is so soft and fine and glossy; but we think possibly the hour's work that is given to that coat every morning has something to do with her sleek appearance.

We shall go off over the hills, up through the Centre, and westward to the Pray Woods. Perhaps we shall see a fox gliding along out on

the rim of the hill; perhaps we shall start up a pheasant, or a red squirrel will chatter at us as we slip by; perhaps we shall meet there, as we did one other day, a tiny mouse running along in the road, in a dreadfully panic-stricken flight at the sight of us monsters; and then The Good Thing will walk carefully and turn aside so as not to step on the little creature, just as she did before. We shall climb some steep hills under majestic old pines and come out on Flat Hill, and drive across and down home another way, getting a fine view of miles of rolling country, hills and dales and woods and mountains — Wachusett at one end of the line and Monadnock and "Pack" at the other; and we shall come home flying as the sunset is flushing the wide western sky.

The Good Thing will be carefully rubbed down and a thick bed will be strewn on her floor and a warm mash with carrots and apples given her for supper (when she is cool enough),

and she will be as glad she went as we shall be. As for us, we shall have a hot supper, too, and then an hour or two before an old fireplace that warmed a Tory before the Revolutionary War, and has warmed many a good patriot since. And we shall dream and read and talk there for awhile, and then we shall climb the little, narrow, old-fashioned staircase to bed. And when the light is out and we settle ourselves with a contented sigh for the night, we shall say for the hundredth time :

“ Yes, let those have the city who want it; as for me, I will lift mine eyes to the hills whence cometh my help.”

Yes (to your question), I really love these people. I find them plain, as you say, but unaffected and intelligent and many of them well-bred. Some of them looked, at first, with a little distrust on people from “ down country,” but when they once realize that we are not unduly exalted by the mere accident of having

lived in Boston, they become at once cordial and neighbourly. People here have so much more time for reading than we of the cities, and for thinking; and some of them are devoted to such solid literature as would give any young woman outside Boston a headache just to think of; and they have views, too, on most subjects, which they express in shrewd, provincial language that wins your respect, if not your admiration. I have become quite intimate over at Thornton Lodge now, and when I take my daily walks abroad I do not always go alone. And by the way, there was a steady refrain to your last letter. "Quarrelled with Robert" it said over and over. Begging your pardon, I didn't. He quarrelled with me. Now Jack Thornton and I never have a word of difference. He is ever my most devoted slave. He never obtrudes his opinions, and never criticizes mine. The whole family are delightful. Miss Charlotte, the older, is "literary" and

has an occasional poem in the *Transcript*. Miss Alice is devoted to fancy-work, and we can meet there in rainy weather. In fine I will not be cabined, cribbed, confined for all the Honiton lace and shadow embroidery in the world. I'd rather roam the fields with Jack. He is waiting outside for me now. So, a loving good-bye.

PEGGY.

CHAPTER IX

THE GARDEN

" A Garden is a lovesome thing, Got wot !

Rose plot,

Fringed pool,

Ferned grot —

The veriest school of peace ; and yet the fool
Contentds that God is not —

Not God ! in gardens ! when the eve is cool ?
Nay, but I have a sign ;

'Tis very sure God walks in mine."

— *Thomas Edward Brown.*

OF course, they must have a garden. Who ever lived on twenty-five acres of land without raising at least a part of his own vegetables? They had not been in the country a month when they received with their morning's mail a seedman's pamphlet, one of those gorgeous, highly coloured affairs that promise so much

in their flamboyance. The Spinster read it from cover to cover, and grew more enthusiastic with every page. When Peggy's turn came she was fairly radiant with enthusiasm. All those gorgeous, luxuriant, mammoth blossoms should flaunt in their flower-garden; all those luscious, toothsome, juicy, appetite-provoking vegetables should grow for them behind their barn. They would have a garden. Nay, they would have two.

It was Hiram's busy time. He was trying to fill the place not only of Paul who plants and Apollos who waters, but of Him who giveth the increase, for himself and all his neighbours; in other words, being the only man at Elysium Centre who would do a day's work for other people, he had about four times as much as he could accomplish. Consequently the Spinster found that, after he had come over with the exuberant Tom and ploughed up the garden spots, it would be necessary to find another

helper if she would get her seeds in before July. This important adjunct to their establishment they found in a neighbouring village. His conversation, which was fluent and would-be instructive, led them to think him as capable as he supposed himself to be, and he was engaged for the munificent salary of a dollar a day to take care of the gardens. By a curious coincidence, the new man's name, "Carrotts," matched his head, which was red and tapered off at the top. Curiously, too, he had a fondness for bright-green neckwear, reminding one, when arrayed in his favourite attire, of an inverted carrot, with its fringe of green tops pendant.

The Spinster sent for a supply of seeds of all kinds and he went at the planting with a flourish of trumpets and a tintinnabulation of drums, figuratively speaking. His theories were so many and so varied that the Spinster felt herself incompetent to advise so gifted an

individual, and early left the garden to his ministrations; and Peggy, although she stuck bravely by her flowers, doing most of the work alone, soon deserted him, confident that Carrotts knew all about gardening. When he had the plat laid out, it represented the most conglomerate geometrical intricacies ever dreamed of. But he assured them that every vegetable was in its proper place and rapidly germinating in the brown soil. This was partially true, but when they finally pushed through the brown earth they manifested a strange perversity to come up in bunches and huddle together as if afraid of the strange world around them. Beets and parsnips grew a hundred to the square inch. Beans came up forty and fifty in a hill, but the sweet corn went to the other extreme and appeared with only one stalk in several hills.

The Spinster had given Carrotts some sweet pumpkin seeds and told him to plant one in

every fifth hill of corn, after the good old-fashioned way of her forefathers. In his lofty manner he intimated that in giving him instructions about planting pumpkins one was conveying quite superfluous coals to Newcastle. When the seeds came up weeks afterward there were seven pumpkins to every hill, with one solitary stalk of corn in every fifth.

It is doubtful if ever weeds grew as did those of the first Summer at Spinster Farm. In vain Carrotts strove against them. He spent much time in pensively leaning on his hoe and gazing sadly at them, as they flaunted defiance in the sunshine. He even courted apoplexy by stooping over the crowded beet bed and pulling out by the handful young beets with the attendant weeds. Some Nemesis hovered over him and caused seven more baneful weeds to spring up in the place of every one he pulled, and by the Fourth of July, when they had hoped to be revelling in green peas, the garden presented

a waving picture of wild mustard, "pusley," pigweed and ragweed most discouraging to behold. It was then that the Spinster told Carrotts that they must part company, a piece of news that caused him to weep great tears, inasmuch as he had taken occasion to fall deeply in love with the serving-maid. It is not profitable, to the mistress at least, to have one's man servant fall in love with one's maid servant. Too much time is consumed in gazing into one another's eyes.

When Carrotts had departed, literally wiping his weeping eyes, for the maid had refused to receive him as her "company," the Spinster sent for Hiram again and implored him to do something with the garden. Whereupon he immediately went for the festive Tom and his cultivator. When he returned and began work in the garden of weeds, Peggy, the Spinster and Mrs. Francis were seated in the Summer-house, calmly enjoying the quiet afternoon. Hiram's

forcible remarks to his horse were all-pervading:

“Come, now, Tom; why don’t ye show a leetle more gumption about gittin’ around these hills? Don’t seem as if you improved the brains Natur’ furnished. Git along, there. Jiminy-Crimus!”

But after taking half a dozen turns across the garden and back, he stopped and came toward the Summer-house.

“By gee, Miss Fleming,” he cried, hat in hand and mopping his wide brow, “this is by far the most complicated agricultural problem I ever yet encountered. Guess we’ll have to give it up. I’ll go home and get my scythe. Them weeds’ll have to be mowed down and burnt up. An’ by gum! I’d like to burn that Carrotts with ’em. If he ain’t the derndest! Wal! But there, I hadn’t ought to speak out my mind quite so plain. Still, if everybody thought twice before speaking once there’d

be a dreadful oppressive silence most of the time." And he meandered on, driving the sobered and lazy Tom toward home, and chewing reflectively on a red-clover blossom.

The flower-garden in the meantime had flourished beautifully under Peggy's tender care. And she had the pleasure of sending many a bunch of sweet peas, mignonette and nasturtium to the city, often remembering the children's hospital in which she was most interested.

In laurel time she drove for miles through the enchanting woods, gathering bushels of this most beautiful of wild-flowers, and many a hospital bed was brightened by the bunches of lovely pink blossoms which had been picked by her well-browned, shapely hands.

But after all, there are few delights comparable to owning and managing a garden. And the Spinster wrote to her friends, after

a few seasons of such experiences: “ I’ve been abroad, I’ve been in love and I’ve undergone a serious operation, but after all I get the most satisfaction out of a garden ! ”

CHAPTER X

A BRIEF FOR THE HEN

DID you ever study a hen? No? Then, if your knowledge of them is confined to an occasional view of frantic bipeds running madly across some country road directly under the horse's feet, you will agree with the Spinster's first — and rash — statement that they are the most stupid of animate objects. That was before she began to get acquainted with Peggy's flock. The younger woman adored the hens from the first, and soon came to be on intimate terms with them, so to speak, with a name for every one. But the Spinster looked upon them with indifference.

“ You must not ask me to take the least

interest in the creatures," she told Peggy. "I do not believe there is the smallest sign of anything that could be termed brain under their foolish-looking skulls." Whereupon Peggy would retort:

"Oh, Auntie! That shows how little you know about them. Why, half of them know their names already."

And the Spinster would smile indulgently, as upon the vagaries of a child. But there came a time when Peggy went away to make some visits, leaving her beloved flock in the Spinster's care. "Don't trust them to anybody else," was her parting advice. "They must be fed at six every morning and let out. The chickens must be fed five times a day; and be sure you look after the Quaker Lady, who will be hatching her brood by Friday morning."

Then began the Spinster's interest in the hen. The flock soon learned that they must look to her for supplies, and having found this out,



"THE FLOCK SOON LEARNED THAT THEY MUST LOOK TO HER FOR SUPPLIES"

swarmed around her at all hours, whenever she ventured to step out of the back door. In a fortnight's time she could not go anywhere without a score or more of the feathered tribe around, behind and in front of her.

“ Hens to the right of her,
Hens to the left of her,
Hens to the back of her
Clucked and cackled,”

she parodied.

“ Really,” she wrote Peggy, “ they are wonderful creatures. They remind me of types of women whom I know. There is the little white hen which you set before you went. Does she not fluff her feathers and bristle at you exactly like that little Mrs. Grey, who is so active in the Woman's Club? And your ‘ Elsie ’ — she acts just like a certain D. A. R., who is always bustling about on some important errand that amounts to nothing. Then there is the hen that hatched her brood in the wood-

shed. Isn't she a perfect reproduction of the anxious mother who wears herself to a frazzle taking care of her large and rapidly increasing family? I say 'rapidly increasing' advisedly, for she adopts the other chickens as fast as they are weaned by their own mothers, until she now tries to spread her wings over thirty-five chickens of various sizes at night. And she has so much trouble in getting them all fed and put to bed in her old barrel that she barely gets enough to eat herself. Poor thing! Like most mothers who sacrifice themselves so utterly for their offspring, she gets no thanks for it, and I suppose is looked upon by the growing brood as a sort of mechanical drudging machine designed by a kind Providence for their special benefit. At any rate, I have seen large families of children who repaid their overtaxed mothers for self-immolation in this way. Your Sir Chanticleer, too, isn't he a miniature of the Reverend Dr. Whitcher, with his flowing side-whiskers and his

‘ I-am-the-leader-of-as-fine-a-flock - of - women-as-the-world-will-often-see ’ air? The White Guineas, with their eternal ‘ you-clack, you-clack, you-clack,’ belong to another type, the shallow-pated gossiping kind, of which, alas! we may find an example right in our own family circle. (Now, don’t show this to Aunt Amelia.) The little chickens which Rhoda hatched the Friday night after you left are the dearest things you ever saw. There are only two. I have named them Romeo and Henny-Penny.”

These two became the Spinster’s pride. Like the young Israelitish king, they “ waxed fat and kicked.” They always seemed to distinguish between the Spinster and other humans, and went on the motto, “ wheresoever thou shalt go, there we will go also,” keeping close to her heels wherever on the farm she might happen to be. Henny-Penny was a talkative bird, and kept up a continual chatter — a low “ bur-r-r-r,” whenever any human spoke to

her. Even after cold weather came and she was confined within the hen-house, the Spinster would hear her as she passed their quarters, as if in response to her own voice, "Bur-r-r." Henny-Penny was truly a remarkable hen, attending to the business for which nature designed her most assiduously. She began when she was five months old, and laid eggs for six months, with that zeal most becoming to the advanced hen; a trait which often suggested to the Spinster certain women of her acquaintance who follow good works with such single-minded devotion that one sometimes wonders if the world could, indeed, be run without them. When the time came that she decided it to be her duty to hatch out a brood of chickens, she went at it with the same thoroughness and talkativeness that characterized her every act. She was brought out of egg-hood, herself, on the Fourth of July, and on the next birthday of our country she brought

off the nest a brood of ten little fluffs, which she mothered according to the best hen-methods for about six weeks. She would be confined in no coop; it was not hygienic; she belonged to the type of femininity which still believes in good old-fashioned ways, improved by modern thought and learning. Every day she assembled her little flock around her and marshalled them forth in anxious solicitude, just as the fussy human mother sometimes takes her young brood out for an airing. In her early pullet-hood Henny-Penny had been a handsome, shapely, barred Plymouth Rock. But motherhood wore on her, and she returned from her daily walks abroad, bringing all her sheaves with her, but bedraggled and worn, as if, somehow, the world were disillusioned.

At last there came a day when she brought back one too few. A wandering hawk had carried off the other before her very eyes. It was too much for Henny-Penny. She took

her chickens into the hen-house and left them there. Like some reformers, she had started out with the noblest intentions of showing a backward and slipshod generation exactly how things should be done. But when her plans went agley, and one of her brood, upon which so much of anxious care had been expended, showed such a lack of sense as to become a prey to the rapacious hawk, she would have no more of motherhood. She went on to the general perch beside Romeo that very night. No more did the Spinster behold her gather up her petticoats and trail off down the road, scolding and fluttering. She went back to egg-laying and followed it with all her old-time ardour, as some women try marriage for a time and then give it up in despair, turning back gladly to old occupations, sadder but wiser women for their psychological experiments outside their familiar routines. Henny-Penny adopted one of the white guineas, keeping it

close to her day and night. She laid eggs in emulation of the famous biped of old Grimes, — “Every day she laid an egg, and Sundays she laid two.” But never again, in a long and useful life, did she attempt to raise a family.

Then there was Chicken Little, whose career was even more unusual. The first flock of Peggy’s chickens was a large one, which thrived and grew apace, stuffing themselves and being stuffed with meal and corn and bugs and nice fat worms from the rose-garden until they were as big as their mothers. But there was one tiny, downy little one, continually crowded away from the feeding-dish by his more lusty brothers and sisters. He did not grow. At three months he was little bigger than when he first made his appearance in the nest.

“Better wring his neck,” advised Hiram. “Won’t amount to nothin’.”

But Peggy began a judicious course of “home treatment.” She fed him from her hand, and

carried him about tucked into her sweater or shirt-waist front, presenting a striking appearance, indeed, with the tiny head, all eyes and beak, thrust out of any convenient opening, as they went together about the house and grounds. Soon Peggy was rewarded by the first sign of feathers on the chicken's wings and short apology for a tail. Then came a ruffle of pin-feathers under his body and over his back. After a little he began to grow, and developed an abnormally large crop, which he managed to keep distended to the utmost limit. Perfectly tame, he went in and out of the house, up stairs and down, in search of his benefactress; if a sudden shower threatened, Chicken Little came to the side porch and demanded to be let in, remaining quietly inside until the rain had ceased, when he would go forth again.

When cold weather arrived, Chicken Little was obliged to live in the hen-house, where

he seemed as contented as he was dry and warm. Indeed, he possessed the faculty of effacing himself so completely that for weeks Peggy herself could not distinguish him from several of Henny-Penny's unfortunate brood, which had been sadly stunted by their mother's neglect. Sometimes she would carry them into the kitchen and decide whether or not the one she held was Chicken Little by the way it acted when crumbs of bread were put on the floor. If Chicken Little was hungry, even in the hen-house, he would come forward and allow Peggy to pick him up; but it was impossible to know, when he dropped that perky tail and laid aside the proud carriage of his small head, which was Chicken Little. His sex remained in doubt for months; but there came a day when he wanted to lay eggs. And then "he" showed "his" superior education. Should he deposit his eggs in a common nest with other hens, there to be gathered and carried off like any

common product of any every-day hen? Not he! Although deep snow lay on the ground, he picked his way carefully to the back door and demanded entrance, for the first time in months. Delighted, they opened the door. Chicken Little walked in as if he had never been absent for a day, travelled over the familiar kitchen and on into the living-room, looking for crumbs in all the places where he had formerly picked them up. Then he climbed the winding stairway in the front entry and betook himself to the Spinster's own room, hiding in the cat-basket which stood beside the fireplace. And there Chicken Little achieved his first egg. Every day for weeks he came in and went through the same programme. If the door into the Spinster's room happened to be closed, he would demand entrance vociferously, walking in as soon as it was unlatched and cuddling into the basket with the low, crooning noise by which the mother-hen quiets her chicks at night.

But it was impossible for them to get accustomed to speak of the hen as anything but "he;" and "he" and "his" chickens they remained to the end of the chapter.

Chicken Little's eggs were saved as being too precious for ordinary purposes, and when she finally showed a willingness, nay, a determination, to "sit," and settled herself in the cat-basket firmly and squarely for that purpose, a baker's dozen of her own eggs were put under her. A prouder biped was never seen than she, when she brought off four wee, soft chicks; but her feelings were outraged when Peggy shut her up in a coop to raise her family. She saw no reason why she might not bring them into the house, where they could be given the advantages of such an early training as she had had herself. And she, too, abandoned them at a tender age, furnishing another striking proof that education unfits her sex for motherhood.

Like other cultured and delicate persons of her sex, Chicken Little was more subject to physical ailments than the common flock of plebeians. There was one hot summer day, in particular, when she made a social call on the cook and gobbled — yes, I fear gobbled is the word — too much raw pie-crust. Peggy found her going round in a circle, plainly suffering from vertigo. Sometimes hens die of such attacks, but Chicken Little was not to hie herself to the mysterious bourne if stringent measures could save her. Peggy picked her up and hastened to the kitchen, where she stood the hen in a basin of hot water and applied cold water to her head until the feathered lady was relieved. A dose of castor oil and a cool spot under the rose-bushes restored her once more to health and egg-laying. And many a hot day after that would see Chicken Little come panting with heat to the back door, when Peggy would stand her in a dish of cold water, and

ladle *aqua pura* freely over her head and under her wings; Chicken Little submitting patiently to the process and finally departing with her contented "chuck, chuck, chuck," apparently as much refreshed as we are when we leave the Turkish bath palace.

There is another side to it. As long as the dear little chickens remained soft and fluffy, eating from the hand and growing up as tame as kittens, they were a source of never-ending delight. But the normal end of most of the young cockerels is the dinner-pot. How could they kill and eat creatures so tame and trusting?

"Never!" said the Spinster. "I would not be so heartless." At first they tried keeping them all, the soft hearts of the women not permitting the chickens even to be bartered for gain. But when the cold weather came they found it impossible to keep forty or fifty young cockerels for pets; besides, when the birds were shut up in close quarters, they showed

a belligerent disposition and fought and "tore each other's eyes" in accordance with the highly moral verse about "dogs delight." It ceased then to be a pleasure to keep such birds; still, — eat them? Never.

Then they tried selling them. A market-man who came around their way twice a week agreed to take them two at a time, and the Spinster was to take her pay in meat. This plan worked well; they could now eat chicken whenever they felt inclined, without doing violence to their consciences or sympathies. And so tender and juicy were the fresh-killed chickens which they bought that they ordered them frequently.

"I think you sell good meat at all times," said the Spinster one day, after she had sold the last of her cockerels. "But your chickens are especially good. That last one I bought of you was the best I ever tasted. Who raised it?"

“Well,” the man answered, coolly, “since you’ve sold ’em all, I may as well tell you them were your birds, ma’am.”

“And I’ve been eating my own birds all this time?” the Spinster asked in horror.

“Well, yes,” said the unblushing butcher. “You see you always want the best regardless of price; and they couldn’t any the rest of ’em touch your birds for plumpness and tenderness.”

The Spinster turned and walked sadly into the house. She had sold her birds to this man and bought them back at a much higher price. There was no denying that; but she said nothing to anybody until the following year. Then she announced that they would kill and eat their own chickens.

“For one thing, it is their obvious destiny to be killed and eaten. Again, we have to eat. And finally I have decided to eat birds that have been fed properly, killed mercifully and kept hygienically until they reach the pot.

A merciful woman is merciful to herself as well as to her beasts."

The hen is a much maligned bird. Few people realize the true worth of this industrious creature — but the American hen contributes no small part of the wealth of our industrial population. The last census showed that there were then 233,598,005 chickens in the United States of laying age and propensities, valued at \$70,000,000, and that they laid 42,500,000 eggs a day, and in the course of a year more than a billion and a quarter dozen eggs. When a kind paternal government shall have perfected its contemplated reform in the habits of the American hen she will be an even greater factor in our economic industries. Certain dignitaries in the Agricultural Bureau have been experimenting for some time past and now announce to an eager and egg-devouring people that a hen comes into the world with the capacity to lay about 650 eggs, more or less. Some hens hurry

to fulfil their destiny and are correspondingly useful appendages of society, while others dawdle about their business as if they realize that they have but one life to live and mean to take their time about that. But the new hen is to be educated up to laying her 650 eggs in two years. More than that, Uncle Sam is going to teach her to increase the size of her eggs and make them of uniform weight and colour.

The egg situation seems to be somewhat complicated. Some hens lay large eggs, and some lay small ones; some lay a large egg every day and a small one the next; some hens lay only once in two or three days with frequent long vacations; sometimes the smallest hen lays the largest egg; some hens lay white eggs and some lay brown ones; and most hens are eager to lay plentifully during the summer, when eggs are cheap, but utterly refuse to lay at all in winter, when their product commands the highest price. But the Bureau of Agriculture

promises to remedy all this, and that the model hen of the future shall not fail to give us an egg of exactly the desired weight and colour, every day throughout the year. A little education, here, will not be a dangerous thing. After this important work is completed, we have only to placard our hen-houses thus:

“NOTICE. All hens laying in these nests must deposit eggs weighing not less than two and one-half ounces and of a deep, coffee tint.

“Failure to obey this rule, or to deposit at least one egg a day 365 days in every year (leap year excepted), will be punished with the dinner-pot.”

Yes. People who do not understand nor respect the hen may assert that she is vain and frivolous, that she cackles too vociferously over what few eggs she does lay, that she is obstinate and that she persists in sitting when she ought to be laying. They may denounce her as a

fussy mother who should be supplanted by patent brooders, or as the irresponsible heroine of that foolish conundrum, "Why is a hen?" But even as things are now, the great American hen is worthy of all honour. Why, old Spain never had galleons enough to carry the annual worth of the American hen's product.

Still, the average woman deems it no less than an insult to be called a "hen" or to have her public gatherings styled "hen-conventions."

"For my part," was the Spinster's conclusion, "I consider it a compliment to be compared or likened to an industrious, home-loving hen, who has a distinct place in the economy of nations and is apparently proud to fill it."

CHAPTER XI

THE SPINSTER TO THE PROFESSOR

“WHAT do you do with yourself out there in the country?” you ask, wrote the Spinster to the Professor. “How do you manage to pass your time?” As if there were a chance for a dull moment. Why, we get up at six in the morning and do not find the days long enough for all we want to do — no, not half long enough. Every night we have to say to ourselves, “We shall have to put that off till to-morrow or the next day; I haven’t had a moment’s time for it to-day.”

Take it one of these July days, for instance. You have to rise at six; the sun has been up a long time and streaming across the east

chamber floor; the birds have been singing for hours; teams clatter by; the oriole close to your window calls to you in bell-tones to come out and see the world at its loveliest. And as you went to bed at nine the night before and have had nearly nine hours of sleep, you are rested and glad to greet the new day. There is none of that tired feeling (the advertisement was written for dwellers in cities). You hurry with your matutinal preparations and into your old and easy clothes and get down-stairs in time to go out for a stroll about the place before breakfast. The hens come running to meet you, shameless creatures, pretending they have had nothing to eat since they can remember, although you know it isn't half an hour since they devoured several quarts of cracked corn or some other grain for which you have yielded up your spondulix. The little chickens are trying frantically to get out of their coops, and you step into their corral and open their doors

just to see them rush out, tumbling over one another in their crazy eagerness. My chickens are so tame they can be picked up anywhere, and will stand at your feet and wait for you to cuddle them. They are at the homely age now, all legs and neck and pin-feathers; but how can one help liking them, when they show such excellent taste in selecting you for guardian and friend? It is a foolhardy thing to make such pets of them, but I do it. Often I have envied Mrs. Wiggin's Goose Girl, who could look calmly upon her feathered flock as "broilers;" but, alas, I have Peter and Speckie and Squeedles and Chicken Little and so on through the list of diminutives; and when cold weather comes I shall find myself with a lot of "crowers" on my hands which I cannot bring myself to eat nor sell; and who wants fifty young roosters for pets? Still, as I have intimated, I am intimate with the erratic little creatures and storing up trouble for next fall; but just

the same, they take a precious lot of time before breakfast, what with being fed and watered and petted and having worms dug for them.

And then there is the Good Thing; she must be seen a minute before breakfast. Her head is stretched toward the open door as she sees you in the yard, and an impatient whinny tells that she wants her morning greeting. She has a big, roomy box stall and very little to do, but she is not happy if we leave her there alone too long; and especially in the morning, she has a welcome for us. Her velvet nose comes out and is rubbed against your cheek, her head, perhaps (if she is very fond of you), drops over your shoulder, lower and lower, until you remember the old problem, "Which is longer, a horse's head or a flour-barrel?" and you decide that the horse's head is heavier, anyhow. And then she heaves such a sigh of satisfaction that you put your arms around

her strong, smooth neck and tell her "How lo-o-vely she is!"

But after awhile, you have seen them all, including the great cats and the omnipresent collie pup, and manage to get into the house to breakfast. From the dining-room windows you see the blossoms of trees, lilacs, horse-chestnut and shrubbery; the scent of many flowers and of the growing things outside floats in and makes the morning an enchanted hour, and you are glad to be alive, and that you live in the country.

Then, having finished your coffee, the day fairly begins. More things out-of-doors must be seen to; gardens have to be made, things transplanted, the roses treated with kerosene emulsion, the currant-bushes given their hellebore, the rose-garden cultivated, the sitting hens fed, the Good Thing to be led from her stall to the beautiful paddock which takes in half the orchard, and where she can nibble the short

sweet grass and have her feet on the cool moist ground. There is a man to be kept at work, perhaps two of them. And the "R. F. D." arrives at half-past nine. You have been up several hours and done a lot of things, and are ready now to sit down and read your letters and papers; but ten chances to one you haven't the time to do anything more than glance at them; too busy. If there are letters to be answered, you have just time to get them ready for the postman before he comes back from his route and returns to the village.

And soon it is noon. The afternoon goes just as quickly, and although you have solemnly promised yourself and the doctor that nothing shall prevent your having a nice nap every day after lunch, you seldom find time to have it. You lie down, perhaps, but some one wants to know where the hammer is, or what to do with the weeds from the garden, or where they shall set the little syringa-bush, or if the Good

Thing ought not to be taken to the blacksmith, or if that speckled hen isn't bringing off her chickens to-day, or where the pattern for Peggy's shirt-waist is, or what you did with the *Century*, or where they'll find the furniture polish, or if you are going to the village, and if so, may they go too? And you give it up so many times that you finally forget that afternoon naps were ever thought of. There is a delightful Summer-house down in the orchard, which is especially inviting in the afternoons, with easy chairs to sit in and lovely long shadows to watch and birds to see and hear, and soft, persuasive winds to whisper to you; but so far this year I have sat down there just once.

For years, before I left the city, I saved up books to read when I should realize my dream of getting out into the country some day. There are several hundred of them; books I could never get time to look into in town, but which I was going to have such a good time with in

the country — some day, some day. How many of them have I read? Let me whisper in your ear. Not one. I have too much to do, every day and all day. And the first thing you know after breakfast it is after supper, and you are sitting on the piazza watching the sun go down behind the apple-trees that make such a pretty outline, with a line of soft light under, against the western sky; just such a picture as you have seen in art exhibitions and admired so much.

You might go in, when the dark finally settles down, and sit by the evening lamp and read one of those books now; but the evening paper is there (provided somebody has been to the village), and then, too, you are so sleepy and tired! You give it up. To-morrow night you will read. To-night, just to-night, you really must go to bed. And you soon sink into hearty, serene, dreamless sleep. And there are ever so many things left over for to-morrow,

too. You haven't accomplished half the things you set out to do this morning. And to-morrow will be as busy a day as this. Yes; but you will wake refreshed and eager; and you wouldn't give up this sort of life, anyhow. And there is time enough. The rush and crowding of life as it comes in cities, when one is breathlessly behind all the time, does not enter into existence here. There is enough to do, but there is time enough to do it. And what we do not do to-day can be done to-morrow. So we do not fret ourselves, or get impatient. We just go on, living a full life every moment, time flying, interest increasing, beauty deepening; but "dull" — never.

"What do we do when it rains?" Well, in the first place we follow the example of the Romans, having a new and particular interest in the rain. In the town, we do not like rain. It interferes with our going out; we have no excuse for rain where watering-carts are plenty.

Rains are dull and dreary; they make mud, and we do not like mud; they wet our best bonnets and spoil our new walking-shoes.

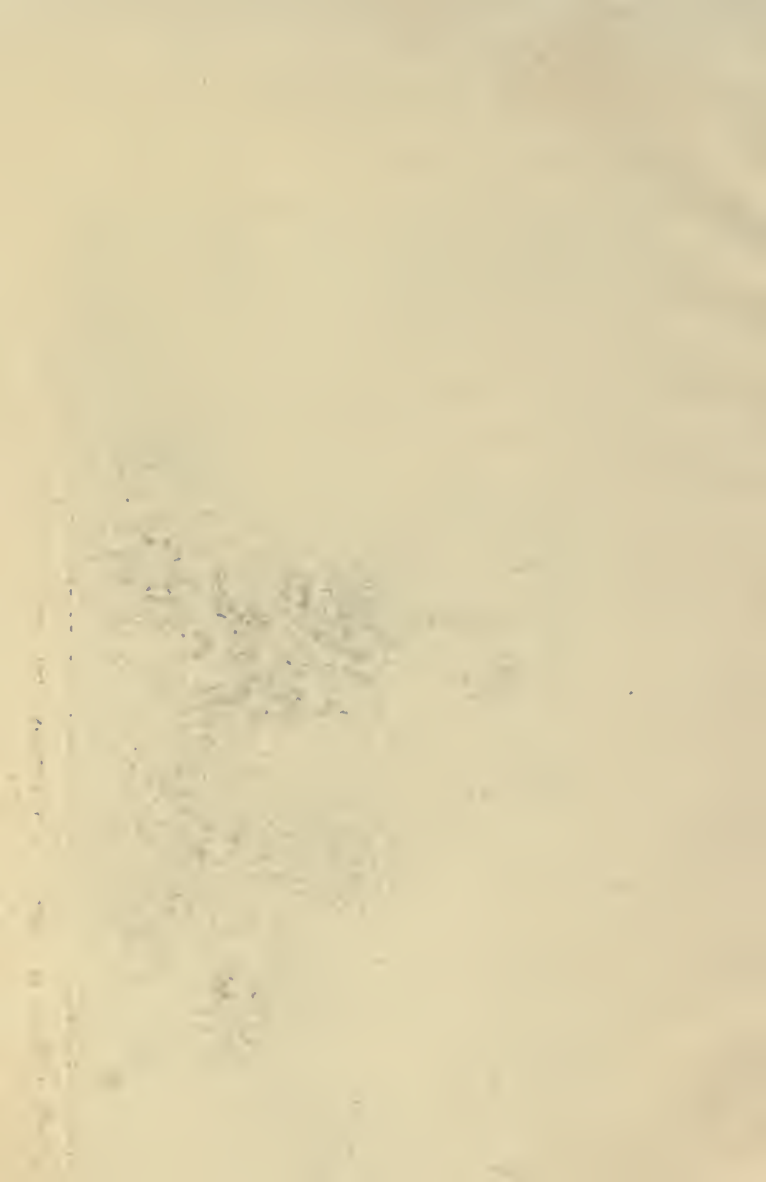
But out here, we have open fields and well-seeded grounds; we have gardens and thirsty plants, to say nothing of dusty roads; and when God sendeth the rain, we stay indoors and love to see it soak into the grass and unfold the leaves and, with the accompanying wind, shake out the tender leaves. "The gentle-dropping rain" is heartily welcome, even when it comes in an all-day downpour and washes out gullies in the roadways.

Besides, there are plenty of things to do when it rains. Outdoors is so lovely now that we never stay in a moment longer than necessary when the sun shines; so when the rain makes it imperative to keep under cover, there are many odds and ends of things to be done. And then there is a big old-fashioned fireplace and plenty of fine, dry wood, with the necessary "chunk"

for a back-log. Do you remember the discussion in Mrs. Stowe's "Old Town Folks" about a fireplace fire? How the old people could never agree about the placing of the middle stick and the fore-log? Now there is a right and a wrong way to build a fireplace fire—that is, if you want to sit beside it in a rainy day and read or dream. The back-log must not be too big and it must be big enough. It must be put at the very back and not allowed to project itself too far toward the front; and the andirons must be set at the right angle beside it. Some (ignorant persons) will even set the back-log up on the andirons, well out of the ashes (where it cannot and will not burn). And some will insist on having all the ashes from a former fire removed. That is not the right way. You must leave a good bed of ashes for the back-log to lie in; for the mission of back-logs is, not to burn, but to make a good background for the fire and to help throw the heat out into the room.



“ THERE IS A RIGHT AND A WRONG WAY TO BUILD A FIREPLACE FIRE ”



Then the andirons must be put close up, so to hold up the fire that is to be built. If you happen to have your grandfather's old hand-wrought iron ones, the very ones he went to housekeeping with, why, that will add a thrill of possession to the fire, and help to warm the cockles of your heart. Now, put plenty of soft kindlings in front of your back-log, and pile your sticks up across the andirons, not too close together, and touch it off with a match. And now draw up your chair and watch it — and let it rain — who cares?

Or, if the fire-god does not exercise its mysterious fascinations over you so that you cannot read, select a good book. It may be the latest novel, the recent book of essays that everybody is talking about, or it may be a late magazine. Better yet, it may be that book you have been saving up so long to read when you have time, or that old favourite you have read until you have it almost by heart;

this is the very time and place, and — let it rain. By and by you will get drowsy, perhaps, and will drop off to sleep, provided you have been wise and chosen a chair with an easy resting-place for the head; or you may want a change, instead of a nap.

Then try the piano. It is on a rainy day in the country that the real companionship of a piano comes into play. You will sit down with no particular desire to learn something, or to show off before folks; but just to let your fingers stray over the keys, recalling old melodies you learned long years ago, favourites of your own or of mother's or father's; just tunes that are a part of your life. The house will be quite still, because there will be others somewhere about who will be listening with a heart-interest that they do not have when you play more classical things of an evening or on occasions when you are all dressed up, so to speak, in sonatas and symphonic poems and rhapsodies.

But you will not be conscious of the others, you will just play and play and play. And the first thing you know, dusk will be coming on, and the day draws to a close — such a short day after all, and one that has done you so much good; one that has helped you find yourself and get your balance, and think things that there is no time for when the sun shines.

And as night settles down, and the family gathers around that open fire, replenished every little while with a basket of chips to make a cheerful blaze, you will feel what it is to have a real old-fashioned home; you will know that the quiet, rainy day has watered your soul and your affections, just as it has watered the thirsty earth. And when you finally tear yourself away from the dying embers, after you have watched the flames die and the coals crumble, and picture after picture dissolve into ashes, you will feel that your life has been enriched and broadened; that when morning

comes with its sunshine and its new duties, you will be ready to meet it with an uplifted heart. And you will say over to yourself, going up the little narrow, winding stairs with your candle: "Into every life, some rain must fall; some days be dark and dreary;" but what should we do if life were all sunshine?

Thank God for his rainy days.

J. F.

P. S. — Have I thought better of it? Can I persuade myself, etc.? Well, no, my friend. Let's just stay the good friends we have been for years. We are too old to change. Don't speak of it again, but when you get back from your vacation in Colorado, come out and see

J. F.

CHAPTER XII

THE SPINSTER'S CATS

ACCORDING to a time-honoured tradition, spinsterhood is not complete without its three concomitants, a pot of heliotrope, a canary bird and a cat. Now the Spinster detested heliotrope and so lacked the first condition, while the second was missing because of the preponderance of the third. In short, she loved canaries not less but cats a great deal more, and when she moved from the city to Spinster Farm, not only she, but Peggy and Mary Jane were so loaded down with cats in bags and cats in baskets that when they alighted from the train the natives stood aghast. And there is a tradition in Elysium to this day that she brought with her, in the passenger coach, thirteen cats.

There were only four, however — which fact aptly illustrates the rapidity with which a piece of news will multiply itself in a country town. But if they were counted by avoirdupois instead of by head, the aggregate of the Spinster's fine, great cats would amount, doubtless, to that of thirteen of the average farmer's thin, dejected felines, who depend solely on their own prowess for an occasional meal. The Spinster's four would weigh, lumped together (indeed, if her cats were to suffer such indignity!), over seventy pounds; great, sleek, handsome fellows that were the envy of every cat-lover who beheld them.

Thomas Erastus was the oldest of the quartette, a noble Maltese, whose splendid head spoke eloquently of his relationship to the lion and verified the many tales of his remarkable intelligence. Thomas Erastus took kindly to the country at once, and his delight at being free to go when and where he would was almost

pathetic to see. He was a cautious fellow, and having once been lost for ten days when his mistress took him away for the Summer, he set about making himself familiar with the geography of his new home. When he had finished his elaborate survey of Spinster Farm, he settled down for the inveterate scrubbing which immaculate and pampered cats indulge in at all times and seasons; and from that hour was as contented as if he had lived on that particular spot from his far distant kittenhood.

“Don’t tell me a cat cannot be moved,” the Spinster was in the habit of saying, “or that they are more attached to places than to people. If you treat your cat like the dignified individual he really is, and love him, he will love you far more than he does any mere shell of a house. And wherever you go, there he will be content to go also, especially if all the familiar belongings, the rugs and sofas and easy chairs,

go too. It's your own fault if your cat will not be moved."

Then there was James the First, or more appropriately, Peggy said, "Jim-Dandy," a black-and-white cat of aldermanic proportions and benevolent dignity; and Pomp, his brother, of scarcely less dimensions but more sombre hue, with no white trimmings at all; and last of all, the one working member, "Buffie," who cultivated assiduously the neglected art (on Spinster Farm) of hunting out mice and rats. There was no dog, because all these felines objected to them, not only on general principles but in specific, individual cases, so that various and sundry dogs fled the place with wild howls of fear and rage, and streaks of gore on their noses, which had been poking into other people's business.

But they still look forward to owning a good dog some day — the Spinster and Peggy. For they are not of that order of humans who cannot

cherish a love for both cats and dogs. Instead, they love all animals, and value the companionship of every bird and beast. And yet, when the open fire blazed at night and one or two of the great cats lay stretched on the hearth rug, what more was needed to add the finishing touch of comfort and companionship?

Peggy, indeed, thought seriously of raising Angora cats for sale, and establishing a cattery on a large scale. But when she looked into the matter and estimated the expense of building and getting fine stock, the amount of care they must have and the uncertainty both of kittenhood and of profits, she gave it up. Perhaps, after all, it was because of her love for the cats themselves.

"I never could sell them, Auntie," she said. "After feeding and caring for the dear, fluffy little things for several months, I should become so attached to them, that I just could not pack them off by express to some stranger. I should

keep them all, and we should soon be overrun with cats, so I shall never make my fortune with cats.

“I wish we could find some buried treasure on the place,” she added, with a sudden change of subject. “If that Captain De Horte did ‘run off between two days,’ as Hiram says, he may have buried some. Who knows? To be sure, according to tradition he sent back some men, one dark night a few weeks after his disappearance, and they were seen, with a lantern, digging over by the road, among the bushes. They left a deep hole, and it is there to-day, all grass-grown, and full of mystery.”

“George! I’d like to see a deep hole, grass-grown and filled with mystery,” put in Robert Graves, who was at Spinster Farm for the week-end.

“And while there is probably nothing left in the pasture,” Peggy went on, calmly ignoring the young man, “I’ve been thinking how

very romantic it would be if we should ever find a secret closet in the house, or a box in the cellar, or a missing will in the wall—or anything.”

The Spinster smiled. It is a doubtful pleasure, after all, to have outlived one's illusions.

“I fear there would be little use. If the redoubtable captain was shrewd enough to send men back for his treasure, he was shrewd enough to get it all. We shall find no bags of gold at the end of our rainbow. But it is something to live at the end of the rainbow,” she added musingly.

There came a day when Thomas Erastus, the oldest and best of the cats, was no more. There were tears in the eyes of both women when he went, and sad hearts in the household where he had lived so long.

“He was such a worthy old fellow, Auntie—please write out the story of his life. Won't you?”

But perhaps it was as much to ease the ache in her own heart as to gratify Peggy that the Spinster did write:

THE PASSING OF THOMAS ERASTUS

He was intimately associated with us for thirteen years, and never under any circumstances failed in gentle dignity or in a certain noble courtesy; shall I not, therefore, pay tribute to his memory? He was put to the test times without number, both with man and beast, yet he never failed of being a true gentleman; and what human being can show a better record for a lifetime? If one were to believe, as one is sometimes tempted, in the transmigration of souls, it would be easy to recognize in Thomas Erastus the 'steenth reincarnation of Lord Chesterfield. For even on that Summer evening when he first appeared suddenly — from the unseen, perhaps, since no one saw him enter the house or the room — in the dining-

room, his gentle dignity sat paramount above his forlorn, bedraggled condition.

“ Oh, but the two sides of 'im are just like this,” exclaimed the maid, flattening her palms together; but after the mute appeal in his great gray eyes, set wide apart in his broad, soft forehead, as he crawled up my lap to nestle persuasively in my neck, the description was no longer a graphic one, and at the end of another hour Thomas Erastus was making an elaborate toilet on the back doorstep, preparatory to ejecting all other feline depredators from the premises. For even as a half-grown kitten he had that strange mastery over other cats (and some people) which ever distinguished him as the head of several “ feline dynasties,” as Théophile Gautier used to call his successive cat-families. Thomas Erastus never condescended to the use of tooth and claw for the purpose of subjugating his enemies. He was no common fighter; the prowess that attaches

to the bully and the warrior was never his. He possessed, rather, the diplomacy of the statesman — or was it the psychology of animal telepathy, or the magnetism that goes to make a great leader — who shall say?

At any rate, Thomas Erastus had only to look at other cats, playful, presuming or belligerent, to subdue them. I have seen the friskiest of kittens, when about to pounce upon the leonine form of the older cat in abandoned impudence, suddenly drop his gleeful tail and retire to a safe distance for a meditative moment, at one calm look from Thomas Erastus. I have seen stray and battle-marked veterans flee as if from a pestilence after a near approach to the piazza where sat Thomas Erastus with that far, inscrutable gaze. I have even seen our own cats, which he always tolerated courteously and sometimes seemed to love, obey his silent behests and yield up some coveted position beside the fire or in a cushioned chair at the

mere masterfulness of his quiet gaze; but I never saw Thomas Erastus in the rôle of a bully or assume a show of authority. What mental power is it that sometimes displays itself in "dumb" animals and which even "the beasts of the field" recognize and obey?

His patriarchal attitude toward the other family cats was always a source of amusement to human onlookers. He was no more like the father who appropriates the best of everything in the family circle simply because he is the head than he was like the mother who gives up unselfishly even the food she should eat; but the most comfortable places, the choicest tidbits, the highest honours gravitated to him as naturally as they must have gone to Abraham, in the days of old, at the head of his tribe.

As I have intimated, his orders were never audible, but they were understood, and he was ruler of his kingdom. When we lived where all cats must be kept indoors at night, who

could get ours in on those charming, moonlit nights when elves and witches and the mysterious cat-spirit were altogether in sympathy? Who, when rattle-pated kittens frisked saucily around the corners of the house in apparent oblivion of anxious feminine voices, used to march sedately forth among them and in his dignified, silent, grave fashion, round them all up and escort them to the back door, where he would wait until the last of the silly brood was well indoors before entering himself? None but Thomas Erastus. And this practice he never forgot, but even a few nights before he gently breathed his last, when venturesome young Buffie refused to enter the ark of safety, he went forth, this dignified old fellow, and brought the yellow one in, tractable and affectionate and with an "I-am-sorry" air that sat comically upon his waving plume-like tail.

It is comforting to remember, when you have housed and fed and tended and loved an animal

for thirteen years, that you have given at least one of God's little creatures a happy life. I have but one dreadful fifteen-day trouble to reproach myself with, though that was not the result of any lack of tenderness or care. I refer to the time, off out in the country, when Thomas Erastus was stolen and carried half a mile away and shut up in a vacant outbuilding, only to be discovered after we had ransacked the whole surrounding region in vain, advertising and offering rewards in futile, anxious fashion. We never knew just how it happened. One morning there was no Thomas Erastus; that was all. He had been there the night before, but the place being so quiet and peaceful, the "cat-hole" (the invention of some soft-hearted old Puritan) was left open. It was then we found his true relation to the family. It was then we realized what it means to miss the companionship of so truly intelligent a cat. I had almost said, "human" instead

of intelligent, but I am a little doubtful of the compliment. We searched every corner of the house and barn and grounds. We went all through the neighbouring barns. We walked for miles through the adjacent fields, half expecting to come upon a mangled, soft, gray body; but to no avail. I wandered through other people's meadows, calling softly to him, until I suspect the neighbours looked upon me as a poor, demented woman indulging in some harmless vagary. But there was no trace of him. I am not ashamed to say that I shed some real tears o' nights as I lay wondering whether he had been poisoned or torn by dogs, or suffered any other of the dreadful things that may happen to a wandering, confused and hopeless pet. I went back to my city flat, mourning him every moment, and after a few days came a telegram:

"Cat is found."

Within two hours I had reached the little country town and was wielding the knocker

at the front door of the big house where I had been directed to go. An elderly woman came to the door.

"Have you found a stray cat?" I inquired, anxiously.

"Are you a crank, too?" she returned, irrelevantly.

"I am," I said, comprehending. "Let me see him."

She went out and got a key and together we went to the outbuilding where she had found him that morning, on going there to hunt for some article of infrequent use, such as gets itself stored in out-of-the-way places. He was up in the loft and refused to come down at the sound of my voice. I will confess I was hurt that — after my days and nights of anxiety about him, my expense and trouble and time — he would not come down and greet me; but I knew him well. And when I had climbed up there over a rickety stairway and identified

him beyond doubt, he deliberately turned his back upon me and sat down.

“It is all your fault,” he seemed to be saying. “If you had been up early that morning they never would have got me. See what a plight you have reduced me to!”

He could barely stagger when they found him; but that good woman had taken the steak for her own dinner to make a nice savoury stew for him, feeding him a little at a time, for she knew all about cats. And, after another dose of stew, we started for home. Thomas Erastus knew that I was taking him there and did not offer to get away from my arms, even when the engine came puffing up to the little station and we boarded the train. He slept peacefully in my lap all the way to Boston, singing his new-found peace in a purr of loud content all the way. Before this episode, I will say in passing, he had seldom been heard to purr, but afterward he always expressed his joy in

that comfortable fashion that has belonged to cats from time immemorial. Arriving at the station in Boston, I went the rest of the way in the electric car, Thomas remembering perfectly that he had been there before, and seeming to understand that it was all a part of the horrid mechanism that was taking him home. When we got off the car at the corner of our street, however, his willingness to remain nestled in my arms vanished. He struggled to get away, and when I put him down ran as fast as his attenuated legs could carry him straight for his front porch, where he awaited my coming to let him in. His joy when once in his old home was fairly pathetic to see. He went over every bit of it, leaving no corner, no closet, uninspected. It was dark when we arrived, and all night he stayed in, sleeping in snatches for a few moments and then going through the rooms on a tour of investigation, to reassure himself that it was not all a dream,

that he was not lost, that he was not starving — deserted by one who should have stood by him as he would have done by her. In a few weeks he had regained his former physical condition (seventeen pounds was his weight for years), but he always retained his fear of men clad in working-clothes, and carried, encysted in his side, a single lead shot. He had from kittenhood been exceedingly fond of men; after this he discriminated. I found, later, that he had been stolen by half-grown country boys in rough clothing. He never forgot it.

I am aware that some who read this will accuse me of sentimentality and of drawing on the imagination; but they will not belong to the gifted class of people who admire and love, while they do not pretend to understand, cats. After his kidnapping and exile Thomas Erastus, duly chastened in spirit, grew meeker and more fond of those who loved him. From being the haughtiest and most reserved of cats, he became

affectionate and humble in demeanour. And it was then that we began to call him "Mr. Loveliness," dropping his more formal name for use on state occasions only. At the last, when his failing powers put him in the class with the fine old gentlemen who succumb gradually and gracefully to the weaknesses of age, he was known in the family circle as "Old Mr. Man," but as Thomas Erastus his fame has gone abroad in printer's ink, and by that name will he be ever remembered.

How much the dear old fellow knew and understood of us and our failings and affections we shall never know. For, like all good cats, he had that compelling influence that forced us to obey his wishes, while the workings of his own mind and the exact scope of his knowledge remained veiled in mystery. When he wanted anything, he would come and sit beside me, gazing intently into my face, and after a little I divined his wish and waited upon him

according to his desire. I seldom mistook him, either. As, for instance, I was in the habit at one time of using that abomination of the flat-dweller, a folding-bed. Now, Thómas Erastus knew that it was comfortable, and condescended to sleep at my feet all night. Early in the evening, long before my hour of retiring, he used to come softly and gaze steadily at me; and then I would rise as in a sort of hypnotic trance and let down the bed for him, whereupon he would jump on to it and make his dainty little preparations for a good night's rest, being wrapped in sound slumber hours before his mistress joined him. It was in that flat that he displayed rare cunning, too, with a piece of tiny wire. For weeks we noticed him frolicking madly at the edges of a certain rug and out into the hallway. After awhile we saw that he had some object which he tossed into the air and caught again, but it was several days more before we discovered that the object was a bit

of the smallest silver wire. When he had played long enough and left his rug, we would look for his plaything, but it was months before we found it, hidden away under a closet door, whence he would drag it forth again when he felt like playing. One day it was lost, and we noticed him hunting under rugs and closet doors for it. We hurried to supply him with another piece, which he took and tossed into the air at once, caught, smelled, and then abandoned. It was one degree coarser than his old one. He never touched it again: but one day, years after, and shortly before his death, I came across another bit of the same grade he had loved to play with all that Winter. I put it down before him; with a surprised expression he caught at it, took it in his teeth and laid it down again. It was like the old one, but, alas! he was now too old; it was as an old man might examine with interest some toy of his boyhood and lay it sadly by.

I am not claiming that all cats are endowed with the qualities of mind — and, yes, of heart — that distinguished Thomas Erastus. There is as much difference in cats as in people. Take our handsome, affectionate Pompey, who will stand stupidly before a door that is ajar for an inch or two and squeak piteously until somebody comes and pushes it open for him to enter; but Old Mr. Man would not only put in his paw and push the door open for himself but would find a way to unlatch every door in the house. There was one, even, that swung inward where he often wanted to get through, but he never asked audibly to have it opened; he resorted, instead, to the expedient of swinging a closet door that stood next to the one he desired to go through, and which creaked on its hinges. The occupant of the kitchen, hearing the closet door, would turn, and that hypnotic gaze did the rest.

After all, no cat is at his happiest and best

in the city. It was when we moved out into the real country that Mr. Loveliness came into his own. Here he enjoyed three years of uninterrupted and unalloyed happiness. For months he basked in leaf-shaded grounds, or under the sunny skies; freedom to wander at his will all through the dreamy, moonlight night, to sleep in the old hay-scented barn, to roam quietly in warm meadows and pleasant orchards has been his. No dog chased him, no boy tormented him.

To be sure, one neighbour who regards cats only as utilitarians spake scornfully of our whole flock of cats thus:

“Why, I’d jest as soon have a peak-ed stick round as one o’ them things.”

But we do not prize our cats chiefly for the number of mice and rats they can slay. Rat poison and mice-traps are cheap and the companionship of a good cat too lovely a thing for that. Besides, Thomas Erastus was of too fine

a grain to delight in murder. I once saw a young rat, which he had caught and was playing with after the manner of his kind, sit up on his haunches before Mr. Man and beg for his life.

And then Thomas Erastus turned slowly on his four heels and walked away, as if to say: "Let those kill you, to whom life is so sweet, who can. I will not." With all my woman's detestation of rats, I could but feel the pathos of the situation, for the pitiful attitude of the rat, caught as he was in a room where he could not escape by any strategy. And anyhow, my cats are more to me than mere mouse-traps.

Thomas Erastus was of a literary turn of mind. He took delight in lying on my desk on piles of manuscript or proofs; or on the library table amid the latest magazine and books. One Winter, when we had a low bookcase standing in the hall, we used to find certain paper-covered volumes on the floor, pulled from the lowest shelf. For some time I picked

them up patiently and put them back, muttering anathemas on the habits of careless people who did not put their books back where they belonged. Then one day I noticed the other member of the family — our human family — picking up the books and muttering the same thing about me. Explanations followed, and the next morning a little sly peeping showed Thomas Erastus sitting before the bookcase when he thought no one was near and pulling out a book with his sharp claw. Once out, he spread it open on the floor and sat meditatively before it for a time. This tale can be proved by other witnesses, although I know I shall be laughed at and asked why I do not improve it by saying the cat picked up and put back the volume after he was discovered. But I am nothing if not truthful.

His fondness for literary surroundings remained with him to the end of his days, and when, after a long, slow illness, such as fre-

quently comes to humans with the “breaking up” of old age, he laid himself down, gravely and sedately as ever, under the parlour desk — to die — we had begun to say, during that year, “What shall we do when Old Mr. Man goes? How shall we ever keep house without him?” But we never realized how deeply we should miss him, nor how sharp the wrench would be when his time came to go softly forth into the great unknown.

We laid him gently away, all wrapped in a white sheet, up in a corner of the great orchard, near where he used to sit on the old stone wall and survey the countryside with such deep content. Afterward we placed a small granite boulder over his grave, where it can be seen from the window through the drifting snows of Winter and the swaying clover of Summer.

Good Old Mr. Man. You have gone to join that immortal band of famous cats which numbers Muezza of Mahomet, Selima, Eponine,

Micetto, Moumette Blanche and Moumette Chinoise; you are with Atossa, Matthew Arnold's cat, and "Mother Michel's Cat," and Dr. Johnson's Hodge and Walter Scott's Hinse and Mrs. Spofford's Lucifer and Phosphor ("human beings in disguise, with virtues raised to the *n*th power," she says); with the cats of Montaigne and Beaudelaire and Gautier and Miss Repplier's Agrippina. God rest ye, thorough gentleman; I wish I were as good as you.

CHAPTER XIII

AGAIN PEGGY'S AFFAIRS

DEAR SALLIE:—Have you forgotten that old adage about crossing a bridge before you come to it? Calm your fears, *ma chère*, for I solemnly affirm that I am not “deliberately ensnaring the affections of any young man whom I can never receive as a lover;” and I promise to remember my descent from the best old Puritan families,—with an old Huguenot or two thrown in if you like. As if I should ever be allowed to forget it! And am I not a “Daughter” and a “Dame” and a “Descendant of Patriots” and a few other things? And do we not all meet and glorify our ancestors several times a year?

Jack's business? Why, he has none. He is the pet of the family; he toils not, neither does he spin (nor its masculine equivalent). At least not in hot weather. "What college?" Well, I have never asked. Not any, I should say. But everybody loves him. His maiden relatives just dote on him. He is unusually handsome, with soft curling hair and the loveliest, most pathetic brown eyes, that win you in spite of yourself. And he has a certain dignity and a high-bred air that renders him quite *distingué*. And although Jack never mentions it himself the Thornton ladies will tell you that he comes of the best stock in New England, — so there you are. Best of all, however, he is the most faithful friend I ever had; yes, he is. He would never repeat, under any circumstances, a word of all the things I have told him, and consequently I do pour forth my heart to him when I feel a little bit lonesome, as who could help it? Yes; Aunt Janet

knows all about it and has not once frowned upon our intimacy, or objected to our going around together so much. Why do you think it is so horrid?

No. You shall say nothing to Robert Graves about writing me. Not if he is your own brother. He ought to know for himself. And what right has he to be discussing me or my affairs with you or any one else? Your last letter began "Dear Margaret." That name applied to me is always a danger-signal, so I knew at once you were displeased with me, and just what tone your letter would take. Please begin the next one, "Dear Peggy" and don't be so severe on

Yours lovingly,

PEGGY.

CHAPTER XIV

HAVING COMPANY

“COMPANY is something only the rich can afford,” said Hiram one day, after a deluge of relatives in haying time, “or for people who have nothing to do. Lord deliver me from folks that want to be entertained when weeds are growin’ faster’n I can foller ’em with a hoe.”

Unconsciously Hiram was struggling with the truth that has overcome many a feeble woman—that entertainment and hospitality are not synonymous words. The guest that demands all your time and attention, who must be deferred to every morning, catered to every noon, taken to drive every afternoon and sung to every evening is merely entertained.

The guest who comes into your house quietly and slips into her part as if she had always been a member of the family; who talks when you are not occupied with necessary things, and reads or writes or keeps quiet when you are busy; who does not make herself a drain on your resources, but merely adapts her personality to the atmosphere of your house — she it is who really enjoys your hospitality. The wife of one multimillionaire railroad magnate, noted for her hospitality, keeps her country-house filled with guests. But when they have been once shown to their rooms and made comfortable she gives them the freedom of her two-thousand-acre estate and big, roomy house, and then leaves them. Some days she does not see her guests until dinner time, for evening sees a general gathering of her clans. She gives them the use of her horses, automobiles, boats, her books, her piazzas, her grounds, but she does not allow

them to drain her life or interfere with her duties; and when the evening brings a round-up of all the varied occupations and interests of the day, there is a freshness and vividness to the gathering that could not have resulted from constant association of guest and hostess.

And is not this the true hospitality? Given a pleasant house, with books, music, pictures, cosy nooks and ample grounds, would you not, as guest, prefer to be left to your own way of enjoying it? If your hostess is an intimate friend there will be hours of close communion, but there should also be hours of silence. There is nothing so tiresome, so exhausting, as "visiting" in the sense of our grandmothers, where the days are wasted in idle chatter, and not only the vocal organs but the brain and nerves are fagged by constant exercise.

At Spinster Farm there have been many guests, and although the Spinster and Peggy were both good talkers and plied their tongues

busily with guests of a few hours' stay, when they had friends for overnight they found the true way of enjoyment.

"Here are the house and the orchard, the Summer-house and the farm," the Spinster would say. "Make yourselves at home; adopt the place; be one of us. There is nothing too good here to be used; make the place yours," and then she would leave them to their own devices. Few guests there have been who did not return early and often.

"There is such a home atmosphere to the place," they all said; "we feel as if we belonged here." And so they roamed outside or sat by the open fire, rode through enchanting roads after Ladybird or tramped over the hills with Peggy, drinking in the beauty of Elysium and storing up ozone and health to carry back to town.

"Poor Janet Fleming!" said some of her friends who could not spare a day from the

world's bustle to go and visit her. "Isn't it too bad that she has to live away off out there, away from things? She who has always been so active and interested."

But the Spinster laughed when she heard it. And often as she strolled through her beautiful walnut pasture, listening to and answering the cry of the "Bob White," or drove through deep, solemn old woods alive with bird song and redolent of Spring scents, or looked off from some hilltops to the blue mountains undulating against a fleecy sky, with the soft June air blowing across her, she could smile again, and say, "Poor Janet Fleming. Don't you pity her?"

One day a guest caught her standing under the white lilac-tree and holding converse with a rollicking bobolink on a near-by apple-tree.

"Bobolingle-langle-linge," the bird was just finishing.

"Lingle-langle-linge," echoed the Spinster.

Bob o' Lincoln cocked his head and looked down at her. "These human upstarts," he seemed to be saying. "They think they can do it!" Then he burst out again, "Bobo-linkum-linkum-linkum, go-ling-le-langle-ling-le!"

"Go-ling-le-langle-ling-le," she echoed again. And again he cocked his eye at her, whimsically and in friendly fashion.

"A little better," his manner said, "but still far from right. Now, listen," and again he burst forth, watching for her echo, and still again condescending to endeavour to teach her to make that human voice liquidate into the bobolink's song. But the guest stirred a little, the buff cat appeared, and Bob o' Lincoln, with a last melodious fling at her, flew away to the neighbouring meadow.

"Poor Janet Fleming!" she said, turning to her guest, "don't you pity her?"

"Pity the woman who comes into intimacy with the birds of the air? Who entertains deer

and pheasants on her front lawn? Who lives close to the heart of Nature instead of in the hubbub of the human maelstrom only forty miles away? No, a thousand times, no."

"That's because you are sensible," and they both stopped to listen to the wood-pigeon calling to his mate from the pasture. For this guest happened to be one who loved Nature, not because it happened to be the present fashion, but because of that inner drawing of the soul toward the whispering voices of the woods, the field, the night, the sky. The Spinster had known her in town as a woman of causes, who wrote occasional verse. But after she had moved out to Spinster Farm, and one day had come across "The Complaint of the Town," with this woman's name signed to it, she had written her to come to Elysium for a visit. And from the following verses dated a friendship that came from the inward bond of Nature worship:

" Oh, for a glimpse of the wide, green fields !
Oh, for the sweep of the wind on the plain !
And oh, for the sight of the mountains grand
And the scent of the meadow washed with rain !
I long for the song of the wild bird free,
The trill of the song-sparrow, shrill and clear ;
For the robin's call and the bobolink's note,
The cawing of crows, I fain would hear.

" The silvery brook I fain would see,
And laugh with the shining waterfall ;
I long for the deep of the wildwood where
The silence and shade are over all.
I long for the scent of the new-mown hay,
Of the harvest yellow on steep hillsides ;
I long for the gay west wind as down
The mountain on airy steed he rides.

" I long to flee from the city streets,
To hide from humanity's fret and moan ;
To feel myself clasped to the Summer's heart,
To know that her secrets are all my own.
Oh, for a glimpse of the wide, green fields !
Oh, for the sweep of the wind on the plain !
And oh, for a sight of the mountains grand,
And the scent of the meadows washed with rain."

This guest had the seeing eye that misses nothing. She saw not only the lovely, sinuous vista of the wood road, but the vine that draped the old gray fence at her side. The view from

the hilltop is for all, but only the fine artist-soul has eyes for the primrose waving over a bed of bird-moss or the glint of colour in a clump of alders in the swamp.

The Spinster often found herself testing her friends by these standards. Driving about the country roads, the occasional friend would catch the beauty-bits even before she did; sometimes the guest would respond appreciatively when the Spinster said:

“ Oh, see, the wild rose has blossomed ! ”
or “ How pretty that poison ivy drapes the stone wall over there ! ”

But, alas ! just as often would the visitor — some highly educated woman with a mission or a hobby of more consequence in her eye than all the God-given beauty in the world — stare vaguely in the direction indicated and answer:

“ Oh, yes, very pretty. Well, as I was saying — ”

“Let them go back to their committees, their paupers, their red-tape charities, their vanities, their new fashions, Auntie,” Peggy would say as they unharnessed Ladybird together. “Between them and us a great gulf is fixed.”

“Having eyes, they see not,” the Spinster would reply with feeling. “Thank Heaven, I left associated and organized womanhood before it was too late to know what messages the voices of Nature have for me—and for me alone.”

And so there were times when having company was not an unmixed blessing. The people who came with the laudable purpose of lightening “poor Janet Fleming’s” solitude, and who found nothing desirable in the country, were the worst affliction. Next were those who wrote, naming a day and train by which they would arrive, and who, after Peggy had “laid herself out,” as she phrased it, in elaborating

a dainty luncheon for them, and then donned a pretty gown and driven to the station to meet them, neither came nor took the trouble to apologize afterward. And there were those, a larger proportion than you would suppose, who failed to respond to invitations for the week-end or some special holiday, thus making it impossible to invite others, when they failed to come.

There were others who came without warning, and it means something to descend just before luncheon upon two women who dwell afar from markets.

“Truly, in the midst of seclusion we are blessed with city company!” Peggy would say, while the Spinster would only smile a welcome and never allow herself to be ruffled in the least because of the meal which she must make do for several persons instead of two.

“We are going to have corn-beef hash to-day. Come over at half-past twelve,” she wrote to

a celebrity who was staying with a neighbour one day, remembering to have heard her say that particular dish was her favourite viand (and what is better if the hash is properly made and cooked?). The celebrity came and partook of the simple meal, and so utterly delightful was the table-talk with which it was garnished that the fashionable lady who was staying at Spinster Farm looked on in astonishment.

“ Oh, if my sister would only do that way,” she exclaimed afterward. “ But when we have company there is so much fuss made over the best dishes, the linen, the decorations, the elaborate menu and all, that there is no time nor strength left for mere enjoyment. All you did was to lay an extra plate; and what a nice time it was ! ”

“ But why should we put on all these extra frills when guests are with us ? ” replied the Spinster. “ I live simply and quietly. I delight in having people come here, but if I strained

every nerve to prepare a meal that was beyond my means, or put on a style to which none of us are accustomed, should I deceive anybody? Would not the woman who keeps six servants far rather come to my simple table and have everything good, dainty and wholesome, and, best of all, have Peggy and me at our best, than have us spoil the affair by assuming a pretentious style which she must know we cannot live up to? ”

“ Of course she would,” sighed the other.
“ But you can’t make all women see it.”

CHAPTER XV

AN ADVENTURE OF PEGGY'S

SALLIE, DEAR: — Yes; I shall accept “that Jack,” — if he ever proposes. And I “think him absolutely faultless.” But why get so excited? Why berate Jack Thornton so unmercifully for being “the pet of the family,” when your adored Walter Durand is little more than that? There, I have said it, although I did not mean to, ever! However, I have had an adventure, and I hope you will look with a more lenient eye upon Jack, for if he had not been with me, I should not be writing you this nice letter in response for the rather tart epistle you wrote me. Ugh! It makes me shudder to think of it. This morning I went out alone,

down by the river. At a certain curve in the stream the water settles back over the meadow, leaving a tiny pond covering the ground. The water is shallow and stagnant, and there grow the most beautiful pond-lilies. I came to this spot in my rambles, and picked my way out on some decaying logs to where they lie in their luscious, creamy fragrance on the top of the black water. The finest bunch, in common with most things on this mundane sphere, was the most difficult of access. But I meant to have it, just the same. So with a leap that I intended should do my athletic training great credit, I tried to reach the moss-covered log close to the lilies. But alas! my foot slipped and I landed in the water, if you'll excuse the Irish of it. It was not a foot deep and I had no fear, until I felt myself being sucked into the mud below. I tried to extricate my feet but found instead that they were sinking deeper and deeper. I leaned over and tried to pull

myself up by the mossy log in front, but it crumbled to pieces under my touch. Then I thought of a quicksand I had heard Hiram telling Auntie about. This must be it! And I was strictly "In it."

Did I conduct myself then in a manner calculated to do credit to my Puritan ancestry? Did I remember the Colonial governor? No: my senses deserted me and I was too stupid even to resort to that usual feminine defence, — screaming. I just stood there in a dazed, foolish way and felt myself going down, down, down, sucked in by an invisible power. Oh, Sallie, you can't think how terrible it is! I recalled stories of people who had been rescued from quicksands, and more gruesome ones of those who had sunk out of sight and never were heard of more. I wondered why some one did not come to my rescue, but my tongue still clave to my mouth. I thought of you all (yes, even of Robert, and forgave him) and

repented of everything I ever did; and it all grew more horrible every minute, —and then I heard Jack's voice! Then I knew I should be saved! and I could have fallen at his feet in my gratitude, except for circumstances over which I had no control. Of course, he made a loud outcry and rushed excitedly to where I was; then he caught hold of me and pulled with all his might, exerting every bit of his strength to save me. But I had sunk almost to my waist, and he — noble fellow — could not draw me out alone. He could and did, however, keep me from sinking any further, and he made such an outcry that very soon some men came, and they all together dragged me out and got me over to the dry, sunny bank.

If you are not already paralyzed with fright, let me add that after I was drawn out it was found that just behind me, in the water, lay a sound log, by which, if I had not taken complete leave of my senses, I might easily have

saved myself. Did you ever hear of such stupidity? But still, the fact remains, — Jack Thornton saved my life.

Hiram says a man once really lost his life right in that same place: and I am at a loss whether to thank Heaven most for Jack's timely appearance, or to wonder at my own stupidity. Perhaps now, though, you will forgive Jack's devotion to me. And I close with the suggestion that but for him I could not now sign myself,

Your very tired

PEGGY.

P. S. — Evening. *Jack is mine!* No time to explain now, but *he is mine!* P.

CHAPTER XVI

AMUSEMENTS

“THERE’S an auction over at Green Hollow to-morrow,” announced Peggy the next day; “let’s go.”

And so they went, driving out over the six miles of country road which showed

“A simple touch of scarlet on the hill
Where sumach dons the colour of the flame;
A leaf-strewn stream that loiters toward the mill;
A golden path that shows whence Autumn came.”

When they had tied Ladybird under a neighbouring tree and joined the group of people gathered in the back of a low-browed old farmhouse, the bidding had already opened; but, with the exception of the group who were imme-

diately interested in the special articles that were offered at the moment, few people were paying any attention to the bargains offered by the auctioneer, a plethoric old man who combined the professions of farmer, jockey and auctioneer, as occasion demanded.

“Ain’t this the greatest mess o’ calamity ever seen?” inquired a friendly soul, as the Spinster stepped up to a row of old barrels filled with the flotsam and jetsam of forty years of housekeeping on the same farm. “There’s everything here but an automobile.” And, indeed, it would be difficult to mention anything which could not be found there, in greater or less profusion and repair; a broken lamp-shade, a toast-rack, a glass bottle, a silk hood, a chickens’ watering-trough and a part of an ox-yoke were the contents of the first barrel which came under Peggy’s inquiring nose. Just beyond lay a pile of old books, some of which dated back into the seventeen



AT THE AUCTION

hundreds, and an old Bible, all of which were knocked down for a quarter of a dollar an hour later. There were sleighs and old wagons, rocking-chairs and bedsteads, hay-racks and churns, old clocks and tin ovens scattered around the yard. A few good pieces of old mahogany were there, too, on which the Spinster's covetous eye alighted as soon as she entered the yard, and some of which she bought for a trifling sum.

Why is it that one enters so recklessly into the spirit of an auction the moment one mingles with an auction crowd? The spirit of rivalry early claimed the Spinster for its own, and she joined in the bidding recklessly, to the end that she went home laden with old pumps, a worn-out sprayer, a coverless stone jar, and some old glass cans, which she did not need, leaving behind, for Hiram to fetch at his leisure, an old bureau, a mirror, and a garden seat.

But there is a fascination in the repetition

of the auctioneer's call, "Four-thirty — thirty — thirty-five. Am I bid forty? Forty, forty-five? Who says forty-five? Forty-five — who says fifty? Fifty-five, sixty, sixty-five? Yes, sixty-fi—seventy — seventy-five? Who says eighty? Ladies and gentlemen, this is a shame. A gorgeous old mirror like this to go for four-seventy-five? Just look at yourselves in it, ladies? Eighty-five, do I hear? Ninety — ninety-five? Who makes it five? Going — going — going at five dollars — this fine old mirror — five dollars — and gone to — "

And here the Spinster steps forward to pay her five dollars and claim her own. A worn-out old rocker comes next, and bidding is started at forty cents. "Forty cents!" exclaimed the auctioneer in pained accents, "for this time-honoured seat of our forefathers? Ladies, I am ashamed of you — fifty? Fifty-five? Sixty? Seventy? Ah! now you are waking up — eighty-seven? Ninety? A dollar."

Meanwhile a consumptive-looking man on the outskirts of the crowd is making an effort to win the auctioneer's attention.

"A dollar and a quarter," he calls weakly, but the mellifluous tones of the auctioneer flow on, "Dollar'n ten — dollar'n twelve — fifteen — fifteen — fifteen — ah! Twenty! A dollar'n twenty, an' sold to John Smith here; and a bargain it is."

The anemic makes his way to the successful one. "I'll give you more. I offered a dollar'n a quarter," he explains.

"Take it," says the bidder, "I didn't want it. I only bid to help things along" — a statement which reveals volumes about the inner workings of the country auction.

Perhaps it is a widow who is left alone in the world who is forced to dispose of all she has and go among relatives to live; perhaps it is the breaking-up of a family going West, or, perhaps, it is only a shrewd move on the part

of some farmer, who takes this way to dispose of the "calamity" which has been accumulating for years; they all have some friends who attend these sales for the purpose of aiding and abetting the party of the first part, and who bid openly but with discretion whenever prices sag; and, owing to them, at least half the stuff offered by the auctioneer sells for much more than it is worth. It is the really good pieces, however, that are the bargains. Mahogany beds—four-posters—bureaus and wash-stands, are bid off by the occasional patron who understands their value for one-fourth of what they would bring in any furniture store.

It seemed to the Spinster that one of the most pathetic sights of her life was the crippled old lady who sat in her wheel-chair in the pleasant kitchen where she had reigned forty years, and saw all her old familiar belongings—her old furniture, her good bedding, her much-prized china and glassware—knocked down to

strangers for a fraction of what she must have known was their actual value, not counting the associations of a lifetime, the memories they brought up, the wrench of breaking off all the home ties. She wanted to go over and take the old lady by the hand and say these things to her, but, instead, she went out and bid in her old mahogany bureau for five dollars!

The way of life, when we come to think of it, in city and country is alike. And the crippled old lady looked at her with hostile eyes, all unknowing of the unspoken sympathy that lay between them.

Another of the time-honoured country institutions which was a source of delight to the occupants of Spinster Farm was the county fair. The second Autumn of their sojourn at Spinster Farm had come before they ventured forth, one bright October morning, to see the "cattle show" in a neighbouring town. A beautiful haze coloured the distant hills, but the

foliage was at its utmost brilliance, and the sun's rays tempered the cool north wind until its pungent breath was grateful to both man and beast.

Half-way to the fair grounds they noticed a peculiar tree. The resetting of old trees and shrubs and the planting of new ones had been a part of the Spinster's improvement of her place, and noticing the luxuriant and symmetrical trees of the landscape had become a part of her daily entertainment wherever she went. So when they came to a vigorous maple which had its branches growing so close to the trunk that they took it for a Lombardy poplar until they came close to it, the Spinster broke the ninth commandment. She coveted the tree.

Driving up to the house just beyond it, she accosted an old man who was pottering about the yard, and asked if the tree grew on his ground.

“ Yes,” he answered.

“ Well,” pursued the Spinster, “ I will buy that tree of you. I’d like to have it near my house.”

“ Wal, I’d know’s I want to sell that tree,” the old man replied.

“ I’ll give you anything you ask,” she persisted. “ I’ll give you a hundred dollars for that tree.”

“ A hunderd dollars, eh? ” he replied. “ Wal, I don’t want to sell it, but ef you’ll give me a hunderd dollars for it, the tree is yours, on one condition.”

“ Name your condition,” said the Spinster.

“ Wal, I’ll sell you the tree and you give me a hunderd dollars. But the tree is to stand right where it is.”

They drove on laughing and realizing that the love of familiar objects in Nature is not confined to any one class of people.

The fair-ground was packed with people

when they drove up in a long procession of carriages, farmers' wagons, automobiles and bicycles. Following the general custom, they hitched Ladybird to the fence and joined the crowd. They went to look at cows and sheep and colts; they beheld prize roosters and top-lofty hens; they gazed with envy at the fatted calf; they bought popcorn and peanuts and ice-cream and ginger beer, and with difficulty refrained from investing in the toy balloons and riding-whips which were offered by diligent and vociferous venders. Then they entered "Floral Hall," with its long tables spread with appetizing fruits and viands which must not be touched; its silk crazy-quilts and sofa-pillows which Peggy declared none but a crazy person would desire to touch; its tidies and rugs; its home-made oil-paintings and hosts of other products of the rural artist.

Not the least interesting part of the day's programme were the meetings between old

acquaintances, and the friendly spirit that prevailed everywhere.

“Hullo, how be ye?” asked an embattled farmer of two buxom women. “How’s Eben?”

“Oh, Eben’s well, now,” replied one of them.

“Got done harvestin’?”

“Oh, yes, long ago. We’re gaddin’ a little this month, — payin’ off all the visits we’ve had this year.”

“Wal, ye better gad up our way a spell.”

“Oh, we don’t owe you no gads,” laughed the woman, scurrying out of the way of a big touring-car that was almost upon her. “My land! What would become o’ me if that thing was to run over me, s’pose?”

“I d’no’,” called the man across the track. “Depends on how ye’ve lived, I reckon.”

And then they went out again and climbed into their carriage by the fence and watched the races — the foot-race, the bicycle-race, and, shall we confess it? Yes, the horse-races.

For one may not attend the county fair without doing one of two things: one enters into the spirit of the thing, or one doesn't; one must either become a part of the common holiday and be a factor in the festivity, or by holding oneself superior to it all lose the real flavour and enjoyment of the day. Are we not all interdependent, one upon another, and is there any real excuse for mental aloofness from one's neighbour?

There may be a highly immoral side to the horse-racing at a county fair but it is not evident to the womenfolk. And to one who knows a horse only by jogging quietly along the rural highways and hedges it is a decidedly novel and stimulating experience. The Spinster and Peggy found themselves fascinated and thrilled by it as they watched the beautiful animals tear along the track, guided by their skilful drivers and showing in every nerve that they were as anxious to win as any human

being could be to have them. The racer is alive with the spirit of rivalry, and a delicately organized thoroughbred is as eager to reach the goal ahead of her competitors as her driver. Watching such a horse enter into the spirit, one can easily understand how it is that a high-bred racer may die of heartbreak when it is beaten at last after becoming accustomed to winning, as sometimes happens.

There were some good horses out that day, among them being an Elysium colt owned and driven by one of their neighbours. Peggy became so excited when he made his appearance on the track that she could keep her seat only with the greatest difficulty. So long as he had loitered around the starting-point blanketed or taking gentle exercise, she had not noticed him, but when she found him actually in the race she forgot to watch the others. There were six two-year-olds in the class, and as the little brown one gained, gained, gained, each

time around, and finally came in second at the last, she jumped from the carriage and hurried over to pet the creature and offer her congratulations; but she found that instead of standing there to receive her, the colt was buried in blankets and congratulations and hurried off to be rubbed down and cared for as tenderly as a new-born babe. And she made the discovery that a high-bred racer is groomed and petted and "kept in cotton-wool," she told the Spinster afterwards; for an animal whose money value runs up well into the hundreds or the thousands is not apt to be neglected or ill-treated. The best trainers take into account, to-day, not alone the physical needs of such a horse, but its nervous temperament, its intelligence, even its affectionate disposition, realizing that any delicately organized animal may easily be ruined by unkindness.

"I declare," exclaimed Peggy as she climbed back into her seat, and watched the next race,

in which the horses were attached to buggies and driven by women, "I would love to drive on the track myself. Aunt Janet, I must have a trotter; or no, — I mustn't. For, I am sure, I should degenerate into a jockey within a month."

"I think you'd better stick to hens," laughed the Spinster, "or painting; or —" She did not complete her sentence. "But we can come over to the races, at least, every year, can't we?"

"Um, — yes," answered Peggy, with an amused smile. But she did not seem very enthusiastic.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CONSEQUENCES TO PEGGY

DEAR SALLIE:—Most certainly will I give you particulars in full with regard to my engagement. And perhaps you are not so sorry as you think. As I said in my postscript,—Jack is mine. Moreover he is mine with the full consent of the Thornton family, and of Auntie. And if any misunderstandings may have come about, remember that you always *would* jump at conclusions. Let me say, too, that your bit of news with regard to Robert's going to the mountains for a rest were quite superfluous; for he reached Elysium before your letter came.

Yesterday, Auntie and I went to the county fair, and had the time of our lives. We got

home about five, had an early tea, and then Jack and I went up to my "mossy knoll" to see the coming sunset. I took along a book and Jack just stretched himself at my feet, his adoring eyes upon me while I read. How lovely it is to be admired!

Well, awhile afterward, just as the fleecy clouds on the western horizon were taking on the rosy sunset tints, a shadow fell across the grass in front of us, and a sudden voice made me drop my book. I was on my feet in an instant and the next minute both Robert Graves' arms were around me. I would not describe the next hour if I could. Some things are too sacred for idle talk. But next year *I* shall probably be the mistress of your little cottage down by the sea! Now what do you think of that? Robert says he would never have given in and taken the first steps toward reconciliation, if you had not made him half frantic with hints of "that Jack Thornton,"

and when the story of his saving my life reached him (with my postscript), he just started for Elysium. And all I can say is that, while I knew it was a foolish quarrel and I was the most at fault, perhaps I knew what Jack would do for me. So, thanking you for the intermeddling that has restored to me my Robert,

Humbly your

PEGGY.

P. S. — I always save the cream of my letters for the postscript. What about Jack?

Why, nothing; I shall take him down to see you all next week, when Robert goes back, and then you can judge for yourself if I have written aught concerning him that was not strictly true. He certainly has lovely brown eyes, soft curling hair, noble qualities, and is of gentle birth, — as dogs go.

For Jack is a full-blooded Scotch collie.

Yours willing to be forgiven,

PEGGY.



"LOVELY BROWN EYES, SOFT CURLING HAIR, NOBLE QUALITIES, AND IS OF GENTLE
BIRTH"

CHAPTER XVIII

WINTER AT SPINSTER FARM

THE Spinster had been too wise to ask any questions when she saw that Robert Graves and Peggy had ceased to write, when he went away to New York; for she knew that while there was a lively correspondence going on between his sister and Peggy, there was reasonable hope that everything would come out well. The Spinster had been young herself; and she had suffered from the over-officiousness of well-meaning relatives. Perhaps she was all the more tender toward Peggy for that reason, but anyway she would ask no questions until Peggy came to her of her own accord. When Robert made a sudden appearance at the farm, that

day in early Autumn, she wondered a little, but welcomed him as if he had been coming out for week-ends all Summer. His first question, naturally, was:

“Where’s Peggy?”

“I think you will find her up on that knoll,” she answered. “She went there half an hour ago.”

“Is she — is she alone?” he asked.

“Alone?” returned the Spinster, wondering, “why, yes, I think so. Except Jack. I think he went,” she added.

Now she knew nothing about the little romance that Peggy had concocted, and could not know that what she said made Robert’s courage shake; she just happened to add, casually and out of the goodness of her heart:

“Go right along. Peggy will be delighted to see you.”

“Do you really think she will?” he asked, wistfully.

“ I know she will,” said the Spinster. “ She’ll be wild. But go on. You don’t deserve a welcome unless you go after it.”

It was an hour later, just as the dusk was falling and the Spinster was toasting her feet at the freshly kindled open fire, that the two came in at the side door and stole softly over to where she sat.

“ Robert and I have something to tell you, Auntie,” began Peggy.

The Spinster laid her hand quietly over on the girl’s shapely brown ones.

“ There is no need of telling, dear ; I’ve seen it all along, and I’m glad.”

For, as I said, the Spinster had been young. Perhaps it was because her own short romance had not lived that she was so tender of Peggy. They spoke no more in the gloaming, and ere long the Spinster left them there by the fireside, in the flush of love’s young dream.

But Peggy’s words made it necessary for the

Spinster to rearrange her own plans for the future. Should she give up the Farm and go back to apartments in town, with the attendant strain and outward excitement but inward craving for peace and the truer inner life? Or should she settle down to a quiet, uneventful life at Spinster Farm, mellowing into old age imperceptibly, after Nature's own way? She recalled the hustle and hurry of the old days, when the mad rush after excitement in some form or other had left no room for the real things of life — when the new books must all be put away for an indefinite future reading, the old ones must remain unopened; even the old friendships must be allowed to perish for want of time — and, worse yet, when the physical strain of modern living had reduced her to a state of exhaustion. Then she recounted again the dear delights of Spinster Farm — its refreshing silences, its ample leisure, its atmosphere of home, its opportunities for friendship, both

in the world of living people and the world of books. She remembered again her open fireplaces and their comfort; for is there anything like an open fire in the country on a stormy day? Outside, the wind howls around the corner and tosses the wet overhanging branches, the low-skirling clouds shut out the light and the drip, drip, drip of incessant rain conspires to bring gloom and depression to the human heart. But inside, the cheerful flashing of the firelight across the home walls atone for the vanished sunlight and invite one to take a book, and sit by the fireplace and dream. She recalled the intimacies of Mother Nature and her plentiful healings, the visits of friends, her "own particular" reading-corner, and, above all, her ever-increasing love for the old house and all it had brought her. And, being a true disciple of Nature, her decision to stay on at Spinster Farm was not long delayed.

The true nature-lover will not think he is on

really intimate terms with his mistress until he knows the delights and the revelations of a Winter with her. One may go out from the city for a day or two, but that does not bring the close companionship, the sense of kinship, that comes from living, day after day and night after night, out in the open country. One must know the manifold moods of nature in storm and blizzard, in gray days and golden sunshine, in moonlit, snowy nights and dark, stormy ones, and realize that there is no sameness, no dreary monotony to Winter; that because trees are bare they are the more graceful in their delicate tracery; while bird songs seem to be hushed, there is still a close interdependence between the Winter wren and chickadee and blue jay and the humanitarian human; that it is in the Winter that one realizes his furry forest friends and comes to know the various trails of the fox and the skunk, the muskrat and the rabbit, the weasel and the deer. In

the deep pine woods may be seen flocks of quail, the "Bob White" of Summer — now silent, huddling together under the encircling trees, or venturing out into the open fields where hang the ghosts of last Summer's flowers, their seed-vessels supplying the birds with the Winter's food. Or one may catch sight of a fox, russet-dim, and gliding with drooping brush noiselessly along hillsides. Into the evergreen branches, too, flits the pine grosbeak, watching narrowly the human invader of his sanctuary; and the wild rabbit, clad in Winter coat of white fur, whisks under cover so quickly that you wonder whether anything really did happen.

It was a snow Winter, that first one at Spinster Farm, when the birds learned to come close to the house for their daily rations. Cautiously at first they came, one or two at a time, but by degrees the flock increased until Peggy had but to call from the back porch, "Chicka-

dee-dee-dee-dee — ” and dozens of them would appear. Wheat, cracked corn, table-crumbs and scraps of meat were always at hand, and when she finally tried the expedient of tying strips of suet — trimmings from their own uncooked steaks and roasts — to a small tree at the side of the porch, which came to be known in the family as the “bong-tree,” she became known apparently to the whole bird population as a very present help in time of trouble.

“Chickadee-dee-dee,” she would call. Presently would come the answer, “Chickadee-dee-dee,” once, twice, a dozen times repeated. Then they would alight on the tree a few feet away, chattering and answering her clear call. In a few days the birds, several at a time, were eating in the tree close by her side, and then came a day when one venturesome little fellow hopped upon her shoulder and down to her hand, whereon lay the tempting wheat. Then another

came and another, and from that time on it was a common sight for the wee feathered things to eat their breakfasts from her hands, arms, shoulders, or even her pretty hair. The little redstarts, too, followed suit, and the great saucy blue jays came to the near-by bushes and waited for their portion to be scattered, calling to their fellows from other fields. Twenty of these beautiful blue, iridescent-backed gluttons at one time, eagerly storing away the corn in throat and cheek, to be eaten from a neighbouring tree, was no uncommon sight. With a view to photographing them, she fed them regularly from the window of the living-room, gradually accustoming them to her presence behind the panes. They even got acquainted with the great yellow cat, "Buffy," and regarded him without fear as he sat watching from the inside window-ledge, but when Peggy placed her camera where it focussed their feeding-ground, they took fright and flew away.

“ I’ll leave it there for a few hours and let them become accustomed to it,” she said. And did, but to no avail. They would never approach the house with the camera in sight, no matter how hungry they might be, preferring to risk anything rather than expose themselves to the instrument.

“ Oh, that some women I know were like them,” the Spinster used to groan. But let Peggy remove that camera and every jay that had been hovering among the apple-trees, with reinforcements from the neighbouring wood, descended in a flock upon the scattered corn, devouring it rapaciously. Before it was possible to “ press the button ” the jays were away on the wings of the wind, and Peggy was forced to do without photographs. As the camera was not four inches square, and as inconspicuous as it could be, she had to wonder at the astuteness of the birds. For, at that time, Peggy did not know, any better than they,

that she could not get a picture through glass with her little kodak.

There was one day, when a blizzard, straight from the northeast, howled around the house, and the Spinster looked from out the living-room into the sheltered corner where a tangle of rose-bushes huddled under a big spruce-tree. There sat a big blue jay cuddled close on a swaying bough so near the window that she could see that, outside of his thick coat of feathers, he was protected by a fluffy and almost invisible covering of down. The wind swept down upon him with such force that it seemed as if he must let go his hold and be blown away across the lawn, the sport of wild Boreas. But he only shut his eyes and held on the closer, as if he knew the Heavenly Father was at the helm, — One who “careth for these.” And so the Spinster got a new lesson in trust.

Peggy went out at sundown, when the mercury fell below zero, and tried to steal upon the

bunch of blue feathers unawares, with the laudable purpose of shutting him up in a warm place for the night. But the blue jay was off in the twinkling of an eye, where none could follow. They worried about him a little during the night watches when the northeaster shook the old house and piled the snow higher and higher, swirling it into great drifts, burying the shrubbery and obliterating all traces of the road; but when they came down to breakfast, there he sat serene and happy in his corner, just as if there had been no blizzard, no howling wind, no anything but happiness in the world. And the Spinster declared she would never worry again, about anything.

There was a big golden ring-neck pheasant, too, who came for his dinners during the coldest weather, and every day she placed corn and hay seed from the stable floor at the foot of the grassy slope to eastward. She was obliged to put out many times a double ration, for the

greedy, saucy, lovable jays were watching, and descended upon it almost before her back was turned. Two crows, who lived in the walnut pasture all Winter, depended upon that spread for their living also, and Peggy derived great amusement from the habits of her feathered friends. The pheasant was king of all. When he came all the others retreated to a safe distance. Second in rank were the crows, and when they chose to feed, the blue jays were forced to settle on trees and count the disappearing mouthfuls until the crows were satisfied. Then came the turn of the jays; but they are much-maligned birds, for instead of driving away the wrens and chickadees, according to some writers, they seemed to be quite willing to share with them. Whether this was due to a really charitable spirit, or only because the tiny birds could not eat the whole corn, which is the choice of the jays, was not apparent. Occasionally a squirrel came, too, and seized upon

the corn, but there were few days when the spry little fellow ventured out of his warm underground nest.

The two crows were Peggy's especial pets. One day during the previous October, when she was gathering chestnuts in the pasture, she had come across a crow which lay partly under and had evidently been caught by a rolling stone from the wall close by. Apparently he had been there for several days, unable to extricate himself. Carefully Peggy removed the stone, and the crow hopped off, limping, to a safe distance. She left him there, free in the woods. A week later, as Peggy returned from the post-office, listening, according to her wont, to the "voices of the air," she heard a subdued "caw." She turned and espied on a neighbouring stone a sleek crow that limped as he hopped about looking for food. When she spoke to him he flew away toward the pasture. All Winter this bird and one other came to the

foot of the lawn after their share of the grain that was put out.

“ I’d shoot him if I were you,” said Hiram. “ He’ll only make trouble for you next Summer. Awful mischievous, crows be.” But the birds were safe and seemed to know it. And Hiram lived to learn what many farmers are learning, that the crow, instead of being his enemy, is his benefactor, eating thousands of grubs that do harm to early crops and fruit-trees.

The snow was deep that year, and for weeks the roads were drifted. The Benjamin road, that beautiful English-looking lane that led down from the front lawn at Spinster Farm, winding away into obscurity somewhere, enchanting as it was in Summer in its wildness, was filled from fence to fence with the white, drifting snow. The main road to westward, too, was piled full, so that the tops of the bush-tangles along the edges scarcely showed at all. And Peggy had great fun watching the men

break out the roadways after every great storm. But what cared they, in their cosy, warm house, with plenty of books and music and Peggy's work and the Spinster's various industries?

The early beginnings of Spring were a revelation to Peggy. Before the snow fairly began to melt there was a soft, mysterious haze in the sunny days, when the swamp alders and willows began to take on a red and yellow flush. One morning Peggy came in with eyes aglow and said :

“ I do believe Pan himself is abroad this morning. Come out and hear his pipes faintly blown down on the wind.” Together they went to the north porch and stood. The world lay wrapped in white, sunny silence. The beauty of it seemed to atone for the zero days before, when all nature was gripped in the icy hold of Winter. Then suddenly from afar came the piping call:

“ Hoo-hoo-hoo ! ”

So sweet and soft and faint it was that it

seemed the very spirit of the distant woods echoing across the ice-bound field.

“What is it?” asked Peggy in hushed voice.

“The Spring call of the blue jays, dear,” answered her aunt. “No wonder you ask, after his strident cry of the Winter and his shrill scream of last Summer. But when the beautiful, noisy gentleman jay begins to think of nesting time, he can woo as sweetly as the dove itself.”

“I do believe the rascal has found where Pan keeps his pipes,” replied Peggy. “He wouldn’t hesitate to steal them, either.” And then she strapped on her snow-shoes and set off across the pasture, calling in her own soft, clear voice, “Hoo-hoo-hoo,” until she soon had the jays answering. And truly no male creature could fail to respond to Peggy that morning, as she skimmed the deep snowdrifts, her cheeks glowing, her eyes alight with health and innocent pleasure, her mobile lips red as a June cherry, her every motion the embodiment of grace.

The snow went gradually that year, melting away beneath the warm rays of the sun rather than washing away in Spring floods. The blue jay increased his vocabulary of love and the bluebird's note was heard, followed by the blackbird's "O-ka-lee-e-e-e," and the robins in flocks; then came an army of Spring birds, making the whole air merry with song. Here and there the upspringing grass showed green through the brownness of the Winter's leavings. Arbutus buds rewarded their search as Peggy and the Spinster wandered through the pastures and woods adjacent. Hepaticas appeared, and then Spring was upon them. And the Spinster went about humming an old bit of song she remembered hearing her father sing when she was a little girl:

"The Springtime of year is coming, coming,
Birds are singing blithe and gay;
Insects bright are humming, humming,
And all the world is gay, love —
All the world is gay."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SPINSTER TO THE PROFESSOR

MY DEAR PROFESSOR: — (*Wrote the Spinster about this time, for there was plenty of leisure for letter-writing in the early Spring*) You want to know whether I am not really and truly sick of my bargain, do you? You think I am too proud to retreat and say the country in Winter is too much for me, and that I would give anything I haven't got to be rid of my old farm. I wonder if you will believe when I say no, a thousand times no. On the contrary, I feel that I am almost selfish to stay out here and enjoy myself so thoroughly. That is the result of having generations of New England consciences behind one — even a degenerate cannot

give oneself up to unreserved enjoyment. I wonder if it is really shirking my duty to the world of strenuous endeavour to live here so peaceably. Thank Heaven, my doctor says I must. That's the way I salve my conscience when it stirs too uncomfortably.

Seriously, I am questioning if half the activities of the modern woman are wise. We rush wildly from one thing to another without assimilating what we take in or what we give out. No matter what we have, we want more, or want it different. We are a restless, unsatisfied lot. Our aims are complicated and vague; our desires limitless and superfluous. Some day there will arise a woman great enough to make absolute simplicity the fashion, and strong enough to live it so beautifully that every other woman will follow her. Yes; we have had, and do still have sharp weather, but you cannot make January of March. The sun has a new warming power, there is a flush of colour

in the swamps and meadows, and now and then a new bird appears to tell you that Spring is on the way. Bluebirds have been warbling for a week, and now and then there is a flash of cerulean across the orchard; or perhaps it is a fat, red-breasted fellow stepping about under the apple-trees, sharing in your joy to be back in the old haunts again. Two or three Sundays ago, there was just snow enough on the ground to enable us in our walks or drives to see the tracks of the small folk who live in the woods all winter. There were pheasant tracks up from the pasture and across the front lawn and on again through the orchard; there were squirrel and rabbit trails, and in the neighbour's pasture the trampled paths made by four deer who have lived there all winter and come out to dig under the snow for frozen apples. But since then the snow has melted and the forest folk glide across the fields swiftly and silently, leaving no trace behind.

Yesterday there was a sleet-storm straight from the northeast, half deceiving us into the belief that at last we are going to get that long-delayed blizzard. But with the morning came clearing weather and a transfigured world. For everything — trees, shrubs, stone walls, fences, even the tall grasses had the coat of ice, glistening like so much glass. The old spruce, at the corner of the house, which forms a landmark for miles of rolling country, was frosted with royal gems. The sumach-tree at the back porch, where for three years the little birds have found winter rations — named by the family the “bong-tree,” was ice-bound also, and the marrow-bones were hard and glittering when the little downy woodpecker came for his breakfast. Several chickadees were waiting in the syringa and a fat robin flew over from somewhere and alighted on an elm in the hollow, to wait with the others for the sun to appear through the clouds and get breakfast

ready. And not far away somewhere the melodious warble of a bluebird was teaching us that old truth that behind the cloud the sun still shines; and that we have only to wait a little when things look encouraging and the good things of life that we sigh for will be all ready for us.

All winter as our regular pensioners we had two crows, a dozen blue jays, a number of chickadees and two little downy woodpeckers. There was always a good beef-bone tied to the "bong-tree" and they all helped themselves; the jays slyly, when they thought no one was around; the others boldly. We could step to the back porch and cry "Chickadee-dee-dee" and the bits of fluffy things would come flying down to meet us. The woodpeckers would not come so close, but did not mind a bit being within ten feet or so of their stewards. But the jays would fly across the road and scold, never seeming to comprehend that they owed

us, at least, polite treatment. The blue jays peck at the bones, when nothing in the line of cereals offer, but they like, best of all, a good ear of corn. When we had exhausted our small store of ears we filled a little tin cup with cracked corn and tied it into the crotch of a tree. Then what consternation reigned! The little birds soon ventured, but the jays could not bring themselves to come so near what might be a trap, for several days. Then one nice respectable-looking female, hungrier, perhaps, or more venturesome, came, apparently alone, and alighted cautiously on the tip-top of the "bong-tree." But before she had made a "good square meal" three or four gaudy males swooped down and crowded her away, and began to gobble up the rest of the supper. Another case of "the woman tempting me and I did eat." And then I found that the blue rascals had been hidden in the spruce all the time, waiting to see if anything hurt her before

they risked their jauntinesses at that bright and shining cup; and finding that she had "found a good thing," were now ready to swoop down and enjoy it. I suppose if Eve's adventure with the apple had proved an unmitigated good, Adam would have managed to take the glory of it, even to the millionth generation.

Do you know the sweet, vague scent of the spring? That indefinable smell that comes from the earth almost before the ice begins to melt? Do you know the red and the yellow flush of the willows and the alders before the grass turns green or the buds begin to shake out? Do you know the soft mellow haze that settles against the distant hills and melts them into an enticing background for the bare trees and brown pastures and winding roads of the Massachusetts country? Then you know something of the delight of the very beginning of Spring. And to the true lover of Nature, who

gets his inspiration from the great outdoors instead of from modern nature-books, there is nothing more delicately beautiful or more appealing to the inmost sense of beauty. Whether you wander off into the March sunshine alone, or with some companion who loves the rollicking wind and the crisp feel of the dead grass under the feet, a walk, or rather a ramble, across the fields at this time of the year affords a certain exhilaration of delight that cannot be found by living in crowded cities and hustling along with other people who live there. I admit the uses of mental friction, the inspiration of the crowd, if it is not overdone; but the intimate contact of the woods, the real "mothering" of Nature that can only come in the solitudes, are what help the human soul to really find itself, after all. Come out into the pasture and see the trailing arbutus showing pink, already, under the chilly sunshine; poke away the last year's leaves from

the little bunches of hepaticas that are just ready to unfold; count up the patches of pussy-willows already furry and growing; get on the lee side of the old stone wall and listen to the robin's "Cheery, cheery?" wonder where that blackbird's note comes from; watch the startled flight of the ring-necked pheasant towards yonder brush pile, and count the mercies in your cup.

What? You would die of loneliness? Bleak and bare? Then you do not know

J. F.

P. S. — To be sure, just now the new snow lies deep and white and still, but it is not depressing. We know it cannot last and that as it melts, which it must suddenly and slushily, it will be the greatest beneficence to the ground beneath; that the white blanket is drawing the frost out of the ground even now; that the arbutus buds are deepening their pink and the

hepaticas already unfolding for their Spring opening, and that snow as hard as it can, the sun is crossing the equinox and nothing can prevent our having as many hours of sunshine now as there are of dark. For Spring is in the air, and in our bones, and in our heads, and we want to just go off and write Spring poems, or what is better and more sensible, say over to ourselves the best of the immortal ones that were written years and years ago.

P. P. S. — The wedding is in June. Then Peggy leaves me, and I shall be alone. Thanks for your kind thought, but it is useless to try. I still remember.

J.

CHAPTER XX

PEGGY TO ROBERT

DEAR BOY:—Of course I shall be glad; but all the same I shall always remember this last Winter with Auntie as the best — (yet). And your week-ends and the little visit I made in New York have added just the finishing touch. And now it is Spring, — and almost June! I scarcely dare think of it!

Such a house-cleaning as Nature has been giving us. The wind and the rains and the fresh out-putting grass are transforming the world and we are already counting the inches of growth in a day. In a week, orchards will be white and the air redolent of the sweetest scent in the world. Bees are coming to visit us every

day now. How do they know? The nearest hives to us are more than a mile away in a straight line, but when our first crocus appeared — the first blossom of any kind in town — a bee was there extracting its nectar and as much at home as if his hive stood in our own doorway. Who told him? Did the wind take the message across the hill and over the intervening strip of woods? Did a bird carry it to him? Or was it the divinely implanted instinct which it is coming to be the fashion in some quarters to sneer at? Wouldn't you just like to know the secrets of the insect and the bird world that lies all around us? Have we any right to arrogate so much to ourselves, as if we were the only beings God ever made with any sense? Verily, when I look around me, in some company — but there, I won't say it.

Again, speaking of house-cleaning, did you ever go through a thorough Spring house-cleaning in a house that has stood a century

and a half or more? It is a truly awful experience. There are so many delightful features about this house, with its sense of home comfort, its traditions, its big rooms, its cheerful fireplaces, its simple architectural dignity, that it seems like going back on a dear friend to cast the least reflection on it, even at house-cleaning time; but it is to be confessed that a house which has stood in sun and wind and storm and drought for so long has collected dust, so that the walls and attic floors are just filled with a fine, dry, powdery dust that sifts down, imperceptibly but surely, to the discomfiture of the housekeeper. We have just been through a soul-harrowing experience of that kind. This house was made "upon honour," and the original plaster, put on long before the Revolution, is still firm and intact; but in the living-rooms, from time to time, coats of whitewash have been applied until at last no more could stay on, so we decided to have the ceilings

scraped this year and fresh muresco put on. We little knew what we were in for. In each room the men scraped ceilings all day and at night carried out several hodfuls of old white-wash, which had accumulated until it was nearly an inch thick. One of our neighbours had a similar experience, discovering under the various coats of whitewash and sixteen layers of wall-paper a frescoed design with the American shield and eagle in it, which must have been put there about 1776; but this house having been the property of a Tory, we found no such ebullition of patriotism. We found enough else. The whole house was filled with fine lime dust which sifted through every crack and knot-hole. And as the kitchen had to be done, too, we came near adding starvation to our other sufferings, especially as the "lady help" decided in the midst of it that the place did not suit her. It did not suit me, but that was where she had the advantage. She could

take her bag and leave it. I couldn't. And again that is where the old proverb, "blessed be nothing," is most heartily appreciated.

There was nothing for it but for us to "buckle to" and house-clean. We swept and dusted and wiped things off; we hustled around and got something to eat, although we sometimes had to eat it standing; we kept men scraping and washing and murescoing and putting down carpets and taking them up (no, the other way); we washed dishes and hunted for things which could not be found; we kept the pepper and salt shakers on the parlour table, the lamps in the shed, the parlour ornaments in the pantry. And we kept cheerful through it all, deciding that was the only way we could endure it at all. There was one morning when Aunt Janet was washing dishes in the kitchen under the most adverse conditions, that she burst forth into song; and not until the man who was at work on the ceiling burst into

appreciative laughter did she realize that she was giving vent with deep fervour to "Lord of the helpless, O abide with me." (Poor Auntie! I do hate to leave her out here all alone. If only that youthful lover of hers would come back.)

But we lived through, and the old house is clean and sweet all through now, as clean and sweet as the country around it. The blue hills far away are putting on a softer tint and, alas, are hiding behind the fringe of trees across the nearest hill — trees which are shaking out their spring garments and pluming themselves for the June sunshine. . . .

(But the rest of this letter is evidently not meant for publication; simply as an indication of good faith. It is entirely too personal for print.)

CHAPTER XXI

A WEDDING AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

THE old house, which had welcomed and sent forth its brides for a hundred and fifty years, never looked more hospitable and inviting than on that bright day in June when Peggy and Robert stood together in the square parlour and said the magic words, and then fared forth together to meet the storms and sunshine of life wherever fortune shall call them.

It was a quiet, home wedding; at least they called it so. But when the guests that must be bidden began to arrive by train and trolley and automobile and carriage, there were too many to crowd into the rooms, and so they stood outside, and listened or looked in through the old-fashioned panes. The house was gay with

flowers, but the rose-garden, the shrubs, the flower-garden, the fields were all in blossom too, and the air was fragrant everywhere, with birds singing and bees humming and all nature rejoicing.

“ See what it is to be young ! ” sighed the Spinster, happily, as she stood for a moment under the apple-trees with the Professor.

“ Also, see what it is to be middle-aged,” he replied bravely. “ For, lovely as Peggy is to-day, she hasn’t half the charm and sweetness of her aunt.”

But the Spinster had no time to reply. Another group of people came out looking for her and she left her vis-à-vis standing there alone. And when he saw her again, she was kissing Peggy good-bye, and handing her into the waiting carriage. And when he spoke to her again, it was only to say good-bye, just as the automobile in which he was returning whisked away for Boston.

“Now, Janet,” said a friend who was remaining with her for the night, “you will have to marry, — in self-defence.”

“Now, Euphemia!” retorted the Spinster with spirit. “Don’t! If there is any one mental state more tiresome than another, it is that too common one which presumes marriage to be the only desirable haven for women of all ages, conditions, and stages of beauty.”

The old friend laughed. “Did I ever tell you,” she asked, “that when you moved out here a considerable fraction of the people we know surmised that a man was at the bottom of it?”

“At my age!” laughed the Spinster with good nature. “I’m fifty years old, and I made up my mind twenty-five years ago that I would never marry. I have met many men, many good men, but it is one thing to delight in entertaining them socially at dinner or for an evening and quite another to marry them.”

“ Oh, quite,” murmured her married friend, *sotto voce*.

“ To give up all one’s own well-established notions and settled convictions after one has become thoroughly set in her ways, as Hiram calls it, is a state of things that no longer looks especially attractive to the woman of middle age, and she does not pine to exchange her life of comfortable independence for the privilege of writing ‘ Mrs.’ before her name — unless there are some extraordinary inducements. Disappointed in love ! ” The Spinster laughed.

“ But you can’t convince men of that.”

“ I have convinced several, first and last,” thought the Spinster to herself, but she was not of the type that consoles her single blessedness with boasting of many offers and so she ignored the statement. “ Some day, when men as well as women are more advanced in thought, a little riper in judgment,” she went on, “ public sentiment is going to progress in this particular.

I have found that there are many large-hearted, large-brained women stowed away among the green hills in homes which are glorified by their presence — women, sound physically, mentally, morally, whom the man of the period has never found; but they are not unhappy in consequence. Things are altogether changed from the previous generation. To-day the old maid does not wear herself out working for her brother's family or taking care of her sister's children. If she has no money she teaches, or lectures, or writes books or poems, or she does anything but hang on to the coat-skirts of somebody's husband, and she feels self-respecting and self-dependent in consequence. She is as bright and happy as any young girl, and even better to those who have outgrown bread and butter. She has sense as well as freshness, conversational power and wit as well as downright ability and good looks. She has live poets and notables and phi-

losophers in her train. She wears well-fitting gowns, goes to concerts and suppers and parties and lectures and matinées, and she lives in a good house earned by herself, and gives other people good times in it. She doesn't care whether she is married or not; at least, one would never know if she does. There are many things worse than being an old maid in this blessed beginning of the twentieth century."

"Really, Janet," said this same friend a little later, "I think you have succeeded in affiliating with your surroundings beautifully. I often come across some one who claims to have 'discovered' some place in these modern days. Because an old town is new to him, he seems to think that it must of necessity be new to everybody else, and he speaks of it as though it had been obliterated from the face of the earth or buried beneath it, like Pompeii or Herculaneum, and he had just found the traces of

it. Now don't you think it a trifle presumptuous—to put it mildly—for an ambitious city man, or woman, unschooled in all rural conditions, to set forth, like Stanley for darkest Africa, to discover new lands, bring light to the natives, the majority of whom are more enlightened than their self-appointed missionary? And when this spot happens, as it does in your case here at Elysium, to be a beautiful and widely known locality, it strikes me that the explorer is rather exploiting his own ignorance. Before one begins his work of describing the place to which he has journeyed, either by chance or personally conducted, it would seem the sensible thing to find out something of the history and tradition with which it is surrounded.”

“Yes, indeed,” answered the Spinster, “Elysium has been continually ‘discovered’ ever since the early colonial days, when high-bred dames from Boston town wended their way hitherward in their coaches to visit friends

and relatives in the comfortable, spacious mansions that still dot the countryside, and which in many cases are the homes of the descendants of those who lived in them in those historic days. And as for the people of to-day, why, the 'discovering' isn't all on one side. It doesn't take the people of a community long to make up their minds about the desirability or the general qualities of those who venture among them, especially if they come with the intention of casting their lot here permanently."

"And you always expect to be as happy and contented as you are now?" asked Euphemia. "To grow old in this house — to die in Elysium?"

"To die in Elysium, and step from here to Paradise," replied the Spinster, whimsically, "for Spinster Farm is next door to Heaven."

EPILOGUE

BUT she didn't. It often happens that the most obvious thing does not happen; that the plans we make with most confidence are the very ones that do not materialize.

The Spinster passed a delightful summer, full of peace and trust and healing. There were the same interests to fill her days, the multitude of things to do, the same drives to be taken, the singing of birds, the domestic animals for companionship, week-ends from her friends, even the Professor at stated times, — but no Peggy. And that made all the difference.

Oft, in the long still nights, when she lay motionless with her thoughts, her memory reverted to girlhood, as the memory of a middle-aged woman will when there is not too much of

modern girlhood beside her. And she lived over again that happy time when she was nineteen and he — the one she had remembered so long — was not much more. Every word that had passed between them, while they loved and built such high, such happy hopes, was lived over again. And she still said to herself that if she knew he was still alive and wanted her, she would go to him, wherever he was. For he had gone into the far West in those early days, and after a long-cherished correspondence of a year or two, had disappeared. And some nights, she pictured to herself, his return, now middle-aged and poor, perhaps (certainly he had not distinguished himself or she would have heard of it; and her heart turned to him all the more if life had meant failure!), and hardly daring to seek her out. What if some day he should walk in suddenly, through the west door? And then her heart fluttered so that she felt that she could not bear it; the sudden

happiness would kill her. And she would drop to sleep and see him, tall, pale, spiritual in build, coming home to Massachusetts.

“I don’t see what the matter is with me,” she told herself on waking. “I must be getting into my second childhood,—or could it be that he really is coming back?”

The thought stayed with her until she began to get nervous, and to start at the sight of a strange man. He would be gray, now, she thought; the delicate face would be sharpened and anxious, but there would be still the old tenderness; she would know him by that. And then she would resolutely put it all away from her,—and go out and feed the hens.

The Professor was very busy with his own work that summer (and it takes time and nerve-force to write a scientific book), but he found time to come out occasionally.

“ You are not well,” he said toward the last of summer. “ You are too lonely out here. Why not go somewhere? ”

“ I’ve been thinking of it,” answered the Spinster. “ Do you know I haven’t been away since I moved out? Much as I love the place, I suppose it is not good for one to stay anywhere without a change now and then.”

“ Why not go to Newport? ” he asked. “ A complete change is what you need. Try Bar Harbour, — or Peggy’s cottage.”

“ Peggy, probably,” answered she. And after he had gone, she sat down and wrote her niece, proposing to spend a week with her whenever Peggy should set a date. Then she went down to the Summer-house to think. The Professor’s last words had been :

“ Whenever you repent of this exile, I am ready. You have only to say the word, you know, and I shall be only too glad to walk with you the rest of life’s journey. I’ve said it so

often, that I shall not ask again. But a word from you will bring me.”

Why not say it? Was she foolish to hold out so long, just for a girlish dream? Could she not forget —

A step on the grass made her look around. A stout middle-aged man stood waiting, hat in hand. She looked inquiringly at him.

“Ever see me before?” he asked in a brusque voice.

She looked at him keenly again. No. She could not recall that she had. Perhaps he was thinking of some one else? She had not lived here long.

“Your name is Janet Fleming? Isn’t it?” he said. “And you can’t remember me?”

He smiled, and there was a familiar look to the eyes and around the rather large and flabby mouth.

“Surely, this is not —” she stammered,

rising. There was not the faintest flutter at her heart.

"Yes, it is," he answered, confidently.
"Here is my card."

She took it and read: "J. Addison Litchfield."

"I'm Jim," he announced, seating himself in her big chair. "I heard you were still an old maid, and thought I'd call around."

"Where did you come from?" she asked. She tried in vain to say she was glad to see him. She felt the world tumbling about her ears.

"Boston, this after," he replied. "Arpentua, Washington, last week," he went on. "Say, it's a long time since we said good-bye. Why haven't you ever married?"

"That isn't the main question now," she found herself saying. "Tell me about yourself."

"Well, I went first to Dakota, then to Wyoming and finally to Arpentua," he said in the tone of one who has achieved. "I made my little pile in Wyoming, and then my wife's

folks urged us to go to Washington. Great country it is, too."

"You are married, then?" The Spinster found herself saying it quite calmly.

"I was," he answered. "She was a good woman, too. Terrible saving, and even more anxious to make money than I. In fact, I owe all I have to her economical habits."

"I am glad you appreciate her," said the Spinster.

"I do," answered J. Addison Litchfield. "Or rather, I did. For she died two years ago. To tell the truth, having money enough now to cut more of a figure in the world, I came East in the hope of finding her successor. Naturally, I remembered you; and when I heard in Boston—I heard it from John Armstead: I see he's got to be a college professor and something of a big gun; writes books and all that—well, as I was saying, when I heard you were still unmarried, why, I thought I'd come

out and see you. Say, you ain't changed a bit."

"Thank you," murmured the Spinster, demurely.

"Not a mite. Your hair's some grayer, but that's all," he went on. "Do you remember how thick we used to be? How we wrote to each other so often, and all that? It was only when I got acquainted with Her that I fell off in my letters to you. She was a good woman, — but close." The man heaved a sigh, but whether of regret or relief the Spinster could not make up her mind.

"Well, I am a plain business man," he was going on. "What I want I mean to get; and when I have a proposition to make I out with it. Say, why not let bygones be bygones, you and me?"

"I am sure I cherish no resentment," said the Spinster, struggling to keep the feeling of disgust out of her tones.

“ Good ! Then I’ll put it plain,” he continued, reaching out a fat hand whereon flashed a large diamond. “ Here it is. Will you marry me? ”

“ Oh, no, Mr. Litchfield,” she answered, drawing away the hand he had seized. “ I could not.”

“ Why not? ” he persisted. “ I’m rich. I’ll give you everything you want. I’ll take you anywhere. And I’ll be kind to you. Jane would tell you that. And I’m rich, — rich as mud. And I’ll own it, — there isn’t another woman in the world I’d rather have.”

“ You are very kind,” she answered, half sadly; for the destruction of her lifelong dream was something of a blow. “ Very kind indeed, but I would not care to marry you. I am very comfortable here.”

“ Really? ” he asked doubtfully. “ You really like it here? ”

“ Indeed, yes,” she answered with spirit.

“It is my home — and I would not change it for anywhere you might go. No, Mr. Litchfield, there are plenty of good women in the world who will make better wives than I. And with your money and good looks, you will have no difficulty in winning a wife that will suit you better than I would, now.”

“Just as good fish in the sea,” he retorted, jocularly. And having uttered this “bromidium,” he rose to go.

“No,” he responded to her invitation to supper, “I’ll go back to Boston to-night. My time’s limited. Besides, when I’ve got the mitten, I know enough to go.”

He smiled cheerfully and was gone.

“And so endeth the first lesson,” muttered the Spinster, as she gazed after his retreating form. Then she went in and up to her room.

Half an hour later, she wiped her eyes and came down to face her reconstructed world.

And the first thing she did was to sit down at the parlour desk and write:

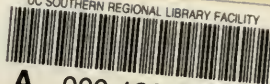
“DEAR JOHN:—I’ve seen J. Addison Litchfield. You may come.

“J. F.”

And the next day he came.

THE END.

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